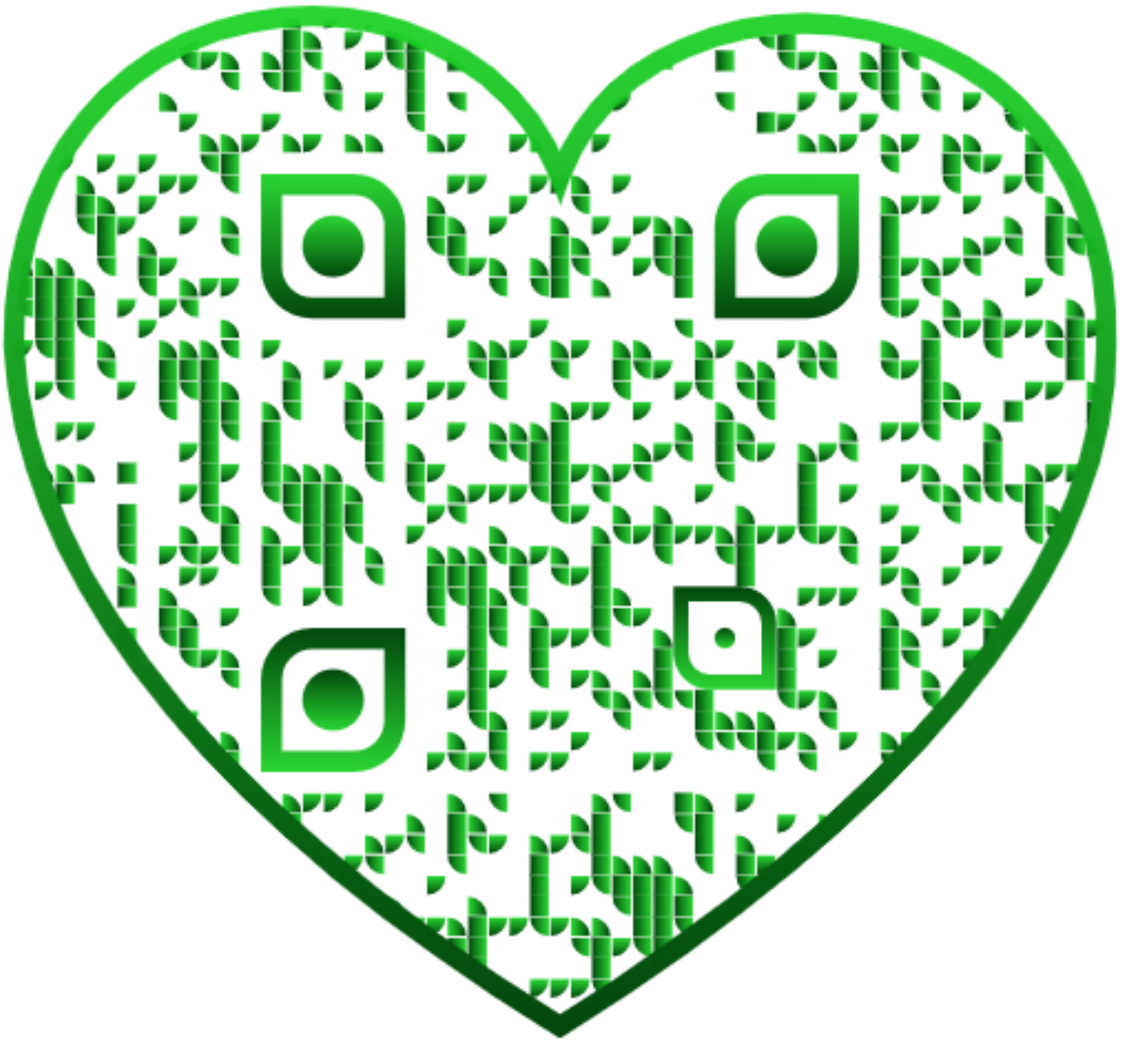
METAL HAMMER
21 PAGES OF A7X
"WE'RE ALWAYS FIGHTING A BACKLASH..."
AVENGED SEVENFOLD
"...BUT THEY'LL NEVER STOP US"
+
THE PEOPLE vs OZZY
KORN, GHOST, EPICA + MORE GRILL THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS
FIVE FINGER DEATH PUNCH
IVAN vs ZOLTAN: THE INTERVIEW
LAMB OF GOD
RANDY DISSECTS THEIR PUNK ROCK STUNNER
GHOST
PREQUELLE: THE BIG REVIEW
PLUS
IMMORTAL • CANCER BATS
TESSERACT • ROCKVILLE
BAD WOLVES • TRIVIUM
FUTURE
ISSUE 310



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IN YOUR ISSUE

10 CANCER BATS
Everything you need to know about their surprise album, *The Spark That Moves*.

14 CHILDREN OF BODOM
Alexi Laiho explains why they've decided to make an angry rock'n'roll record.

16 SCORPIONS
How they agonised over the lyrics for *Rock You Like A Hurricane*. Yes, really.

18 NERGAL
Would you trust this guy with a massive blade? We visit his barber shop.

66 TESSERACT
How frontman Dan Tompkins traded the police force for tech metal.

70 OUTBREAK
Ahead of the UK hardcore fest, headliners Code Orange, Turnstile and more explain why they're part of a revolution.

130 METAL TEST
How did Shinedown frontman Brent Smith hurt his finger, stomach and mouth? Find out here...

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND

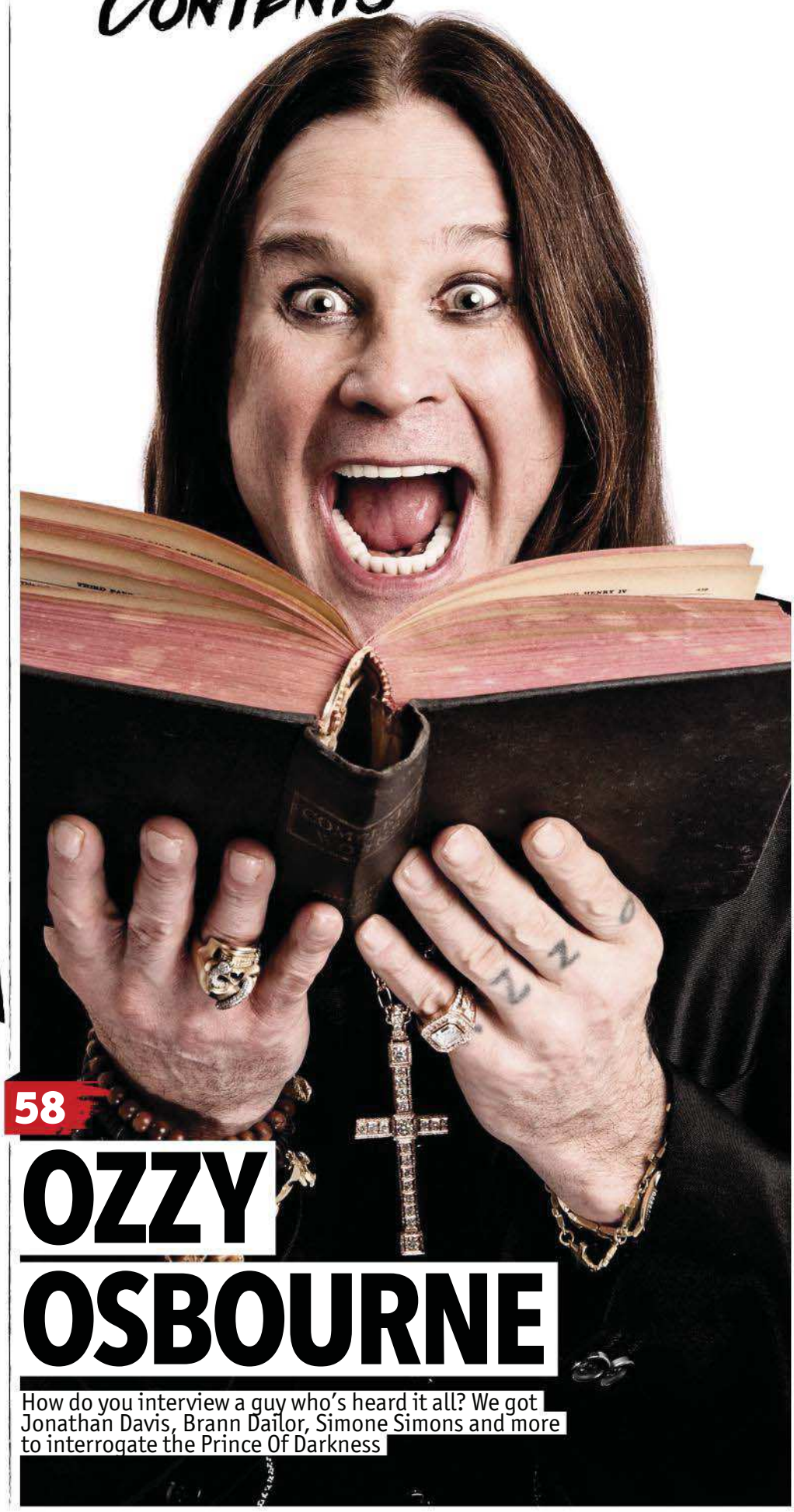
YOUR MONTHLY FREE EXTREME MAGAZINE

110 IMMORTAL
Bergen, Norway's much-loved iconic black metallers enter their post-Abbath era.

114 YOB
Frontman Mike Scheidt has returned from death's door to pen one of the most powerful doom albums in modern times.

118 FRESH MEAT
May we present Messa, Drug Cult and Goatkraft.

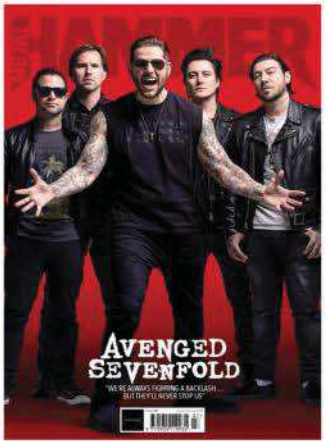
126 LIVES
Roadburn festival, Primordial, Iron Monkey, Origin, Winterfylleth and Uada.



58

OZZY OSBOURNE

How do you interview a guy who's heard it all? We got Jonathan Davis, Brann Dailor, Simone Simons and more to interrogate the Prince Of Darkness



HAIL TO THE KINGS, BABY

Next month, Avenged Sevenfold return to headline Download for the second time – an incredible achievement, and vindication for the fearlessness with which the Orange County natives have always blazed their trail. We thought it was the perfect excuse to bring you the ultimate celebration of one of the 21st century's most vital metal bands – courtesy of Shadows, Syn, Zacky, Johnny and Brooks themselves, not to mention their friends, family and manager. It's the kind of package you just won't get anywhere else, and we're honoured to be doing it.

It's a very busy month here at *Metal Hammer* as we gear up for the biggest and heaviest awards show in rock music – the Golden Gods are now barely weeks away, and we couldn't be more excited. Thanks, as always, for your support in helping to bring it to life, and if you're gonna be there with us on June 11, ours is a pint. Let's have some fun.

KEEP IT HEAVY

EDITOR

34

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

What are Avenged Sevenfold *really* like? They invited us to California to hang out with them at home, for a series of world-exclusive interviews

62

FIVE FINGER DEATH PUNCH

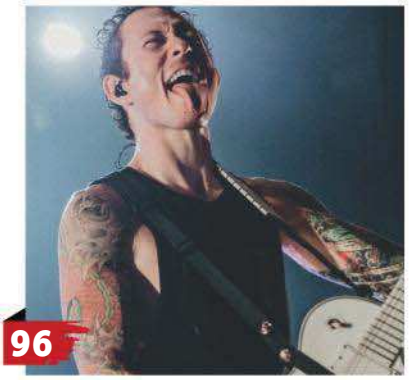
What happened when Ivan and Zoltan interviewed each other? Clue: there were manly hugs and tears

74

LAMB OF GOD

Randy Blythe takes us deep inside *Legion: XX*, the punk rock covers record they've released under their old name, Burn The Priest. Spoiler alert: it slays

80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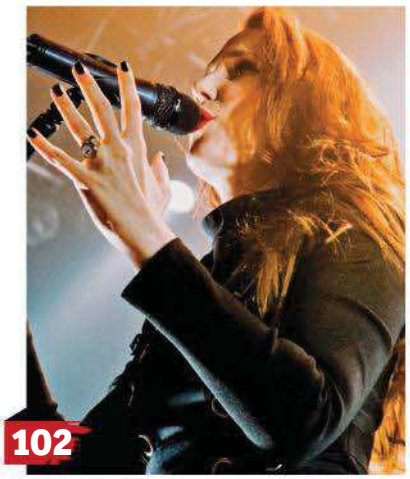
102

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE
HEAD TO PAGE 32 FOR MORE DETAILS

WIN GET TATTOOED AT DOWNLOAD

Get inked by Darren Hubbard and win a pair of tickets for the fest!

Fancy coming to Download 2018 and seeing Avenged headline the main stage? How about bringing a mate? What if you could come to Download with a mate and get a FREE tattoo onsite at the festival, courtesy of Old Sarum studios?

We're giving away three pairs of tickets to this year's festival, as well as an onsite tattoo session per winner from acclaimed artist Darren Hubbard.

To enter, head to **www.tinyurl.com/HammerTatt** before May 30 and answer this question (competition open to 18+ only):

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BANDS IS NOT HEADLINING THIS YEAR'S DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL?

A) Avenged Sevenfold
B) Cream
C) Ozzy Osbourne

76

STORY OF THRASH: PART TWO

Master Of Puppets opened the floodgates and thrash crashed into the mainstream. Cheers, Metallica!

REVIEWS

30 **COOL STUFF**
Lord Of The Rings and Slayer box sets, *Wonder Woman* shields and *Planet Of The Apes* VR games – these are a few of this month's favourite things.

80 **ALBUMS**
Ghost, Zeal & Ardor, Burn The Priest, Burgerkill, Jonathan Davis and Graveyard get called before the *Hammer* judges.

96 **LIVES**
Trivium, Code Orange, Power Trip and Venom Prison tear London a new one; Ozzy, Avenged Sevenfold and Five Finger Death Punch rule over Florida's Rockville Festival; Epica, Myrkur and Oceans Of Slumber get set to stun and more.

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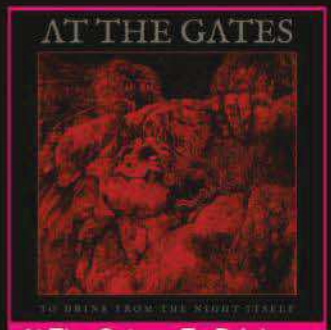
discover the best new releases

Five Finger Death Punch
And Justice For None
out now on CD & limited exclusive yellow/black vinyl **only @ hmv**
The band's 2018 offering raises the bar once again. Includes a cover of The Offspring's Gone Away.

Amorphis
Queen Of Time
out now on CD & vinyl
With their fateful 13th studio album, the band provide a groundbreaking epic about the rise and fall of civilization.

Sleep
The Sciences
out now on CD & vinyl
The fourth full-length release from the Northern California stoner metal band is their first new album in nearly two decades.

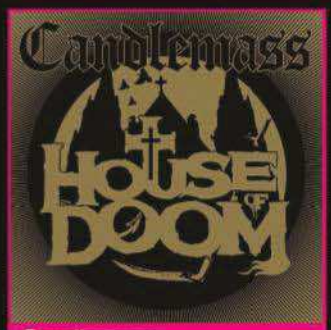


At The Gates - To Drink From The Night Itself
out now on 2CD & vinyl
This much anticipated release explores the group's outstanding trademark style and is highly versatile and atmospheric.

Monument
Hellhound
out 25 May on CD & vinyl
Twin guitar melodies, loud bass tones, thundering drums and soaring tenor vocals are all present in abundance here.

Bullets And Octane
Waking Up Dead
out 25 May on CD
US hard rock band Bullets And Octane return with this blistering new album, produced by Brent Clawson (Wednesday 13).

Jonathan Davis
Black Labyrinth
out 25 May on CD & vinyl
The Korn frontman now unleashes his long-awaited debut solo release. Includes the single What It Is.



Candlemass
House Of Doom
out 25 May on CD & vinyl
The band are back on top form with this killer doom epic EP which features three bonus tracks.

Bleeding Through
Love Will Kill All
out 25 May on CD & vinyl
Reunited metalcore legends Bleeding Through are back with this brand new album. Includes the single Set Me Free.

Ghost - Prequelle
out 1 June on CD & exclusive clear & black swirl vinyl **only @ hmv**
Highly anticipated fourth studio album from Ghost which delves into the plague, the apocalypse and dark ages.

Thorium
Blasphemy Awakes
out 1 June on CD & vinyl
Danish death metal act Thorium roar back with the first album in ten years. Includes the mighty single Maniac.

Tremonti
A Dying Machine
out 8 June on CD & vinyl
Anthemic choruses, punishing riffs and fiery guitar solos are showcased on this, the infectious fourth album from Tremonti.

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A GOLDEN ERA BEGINS

THE FORUM, LONDON JUNE 3, 2003

IT HAD NEVER been done before. A full-blown, 100% live metal awards show, right in the heart of London. The biggest names in heavy music. A live crowd. And about 15,000 litres of booze. The *Metal Hammer* Golden God Awards had officially arrived. What could possibly go wrong?

This photo, featuring that year's Golden God winner, Marilyn Manson, alongside Chino Moreno, Ville Valo, Wednesday 13 and Casey Chaos, captured a brief moment of calm in the middle of all the madness.

"I remember this award show very well, as it was the first show where we were ever nominated for an award," recalls Wednesday. "I was pretty nervous, and when they called our name and said we were the winners, we kind of all just sat there in shock and didn't know what do. However, receiving the award at the first *Metal Hammer* Golden Gods Awards is something I will never forget. That adrenaline rush of winning was something beyond words."

Fifteen years later, we go once again. Head over to www.metalhammer.com for all the info on this year's awards. ✠

MICK HUTSON

LIAM CORMIER

CANCER BATS

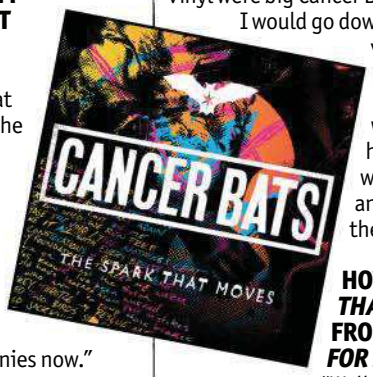
Hardcore's most hyper frontman explains why the Bats decided to 'do an Avenged' and surprise-release new album, *The Spark That Moves*

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

AFTER THE LUKEWARM response to 2015's *Searching For Zero*, which dialled down their metallic tone for a more old-school punk approach, Canada's premier hardcore warriors Cancer Bats sprung a new album on us from outta nowhere blast month. We caught up with frontman Liam Cormier to find out what the story is behind *The Spark That Moves*, how they managed to keep it completely under wraps, and to reminisce on how much his life has changed in the decade that has passed since the release of their classic *Hail Destroyer* album.

SO, YOU'VE GOT A NEW ALBUM OUT RIGHT NOW. WE WEREN'T EXPECTING THAT!

"I know man, we just thought we should do something different that wasn't going, like, 'Oh, hey guys, the new album is coming and here's a pre-order bundle.' I always get frustrated by that. I'm just like, 'Gimme it now! I wanna hear the music!' It's like saying to someone, 'Come over on this day and I'll be cooking brownies for you.' If you're telling me you're making brownies, I want the brownies now."



AND YOU WERE ALL DOING SOME SECRET BAKING...

"Exactly! You've come round and we've just gone 'Hey, by the way, we made you some brownies!' And you get to eat them now. It was hard to be secretive, because it's almost harder to not post stuff on social media these days than it is to let everyone know you're in the studio. That's just the way the world is now, but we made a point to hold back on that stuff."

"SHIT GOT REAL DARK WITH THE LAST ALBUM"

WAS IT HARD TO KEEP IT ALL UNDER WRAPS ONCE YOU SENT THE ALBUM TO PRINT?

"Nah, not so much. We were lucky that all the guys at the printing press that did the vinyl were big Cancer Bats fans. So, I said I would go down and help pack the vinyl and meet the guys who worked there. It was so cool; they were just stoked to have me down there, which is very flattering, and really bought into the idea."

HOW DOES *THE SPARK THAT MOVES* DIFFER FROM *SEARCHING FOR ZERO*?

"Well, I think it's a reflection on where we are as a band now. On the last album, shit got real dark, but now we are in a good place again and we want the music to reflect that. The last album was going for that hardcore, floor-show punk vibe, but we have to understand that we don't just play those sorts of venues anymore. And this record, we went to play the bangers. When we do a festival set, we just play all of the songs that we have videos for. So we were like, 'Let's just try and write an album full of those songs.'"

SPEAKING OF BANGERS, YOU GUYS HAVE BEEN CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF *HAIL DESTROYER*...

"Yeah, I know, right?! Where's that time gone? It has been really cool; we played The Underworld in London on the *Hail Destroyer* cycle and sold it out, and so to come back and sell out four nights at that venue a decade later was a real, 'Woah!' moment. When you're in a band you sometimes don't realise how much progress you've made, but we came off the Bat Sabbath tour and it felt real good, and we announced those shows and they just sold immediately. It's so cool."

WHEN YOU HIT THESE MILESTONES AS A BAND IT MUST MAKE YOU LOOK BACK AND FEEL PRETTY PROUD OF WHAT YOU'VE DONE?

"For sure. For me, it was weird to look back at that time and think of where I was and where I am now. I was basically homeless when we recorded that record. I was living in a tent in my friend's loft! We literally finished recording the record and then went out on tour with Gallows and just stayed on the road because it was like, 'I don't have anywhere else to go, I might as well keep on the road!' And now I have a house! So that's what that record did. It was the first time people really took notice of us, and it's led me to the point where I actually have this house around me that I'm talking to you from right now. And it was when we got Jaye [R. Schwarzer] on bass as well, even though he didn't play on the album, it was when we solidified that line-up that we've still got a decade later. Not many bands do that, so that's very satisfying."

***THE SPARK THAT MOVES* IS OUT NOW VIA BAT SKULL RECORDS. CANCER BATS PLAY DOWNLOAD NEXT MONTH**

Cancer Bats wanted to make an album full of bangers. No complaints here...

EVERGREENS DO NOT SUFFER FROM ALZHEIMER'S.

Carol is no longer who she used to be.

She no longer recognises Nancy, her sister, or Jim, her husband. Most of the time it's as though she isn't aware of the things going on around her.

But when Nancy carefully puts headphones over Carol's ears and plays her most beloved song, her sister's eyes light up. She gently sways to the beat of the song, she even remembers the dance routine. She may nudge Jim's arm. Or tell him what a fun guy he is. For the duration of that song, she's back again. For 4:35, she's Carol.

th•mann
MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

CHILDREN OF BODOM

Are the Finnish metal veterans revealing a softer side for album #10?

WORDS: EMILY BIELBY

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
Ten

PRODUCER:
Mikko Karmila

STUDIO:
Danger Johnny Studios, Helsinki

EXPECT:
A consistent, classic Children Of Bodom album with a couple of unexpected twists

AMAZINGLY, CHILDREN OF Bodom have now been churning out their menacing melodic blend of extreme metal for over a quarter of a century, and after a three-year break, the Finns are back with their 10th full-length studio album. We got frontman Alexi Laiho to give us the full lowdown on what to expect from their next chapter – and it sounds like fans are in for a few surprises...

HOW'S THE RECORDING BEEN SO FAR, ALEXI?
"We're actually doing really well – it's been super-fast so far, so now I am just hoping that everything is going to go smoothly from here onwards."

Daniel and Alexi caught sitting down on the job

THAT'S GOOD – SO YOU'VE NOT FACED ANY HICCUPS OR CHALLENGES AT ALL SINCE YOU'VE BEEN IN THE STUDIO?
"Not yet, not really – but we do what we always do; we're always very well prepared when we go in, so I guess this time around we practised a shit-ton of times, a lot more than we did with the last record, and that's one of the reasons it's been going so smoothly. I don't want to jinx it or anything because you never know what's going to happen... not that I believe in jinxes."

IT'S OK, WE'RE ALL SECRETLY SUPERSTITIOUS. HOW'S THE ALBUM SOUNDING?
"It's really shaping up to be better than I thought it would be, and I swear to fuck I'm not just saying that!"

"THIS ALBUM IS GONNA BE MORE ROCK'N'ROLL"

WHY IS IT BETTER THAN YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD BE?
"One thing I can say – and this is a fucking fact, it's not even up for debate – is it's actually a lot more straightforward as far as song structures go. [2015 album] *I Worship Chaos* was also pretty straightforward but it's got more of a rock'n'roll vibe to it. It's still metal and dark and shit like that, but I'd say it's more rock'n'roll."

SO, RECORDING-WISE, DID YOU CHANGE THINGS UP A LOT?
"Not really, but funnily enough we had more time to work on the songs and the arrangements and it's kind of crazy to think that the more time you have, you're more likely to start fucking around with the

Henkka Seppälä, Alexi Laiho and Daniel Freyberg at Danger Johnny Studios

Henkka waits for the others to look away before sneakily turning up the bass volume

song structure, but no, we started cutting bits, stripping it down a little bit and getting rid of all the extra shit!"

HAVE YOU STARTED WORKING ON THE LYRICS?

"I'm still working on those at the moment. I have a shit-ton of ideas and I do have some songs that are finished, but there's nothing really that crazy, I mean nothing out of the ordinary. I already have two songs that are related to the Bodom incident [the 1960 lakeside murders], which will be another horror movie, King Diamond-type theme, but so far it's just me fencing out shitty feelings and being angry."

IS THERE ANYTHING ON THIS ALBUM THAT WILL SURPRISE OR SHOCK FANS? CAN WE EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED?

"Maybe, with the way some of the songs start and even the actual record, that itself is going to be a surprise for anyone who has heard a Children Of Bodom album before! It's also going to be a little different because we're going to have an actual intro song this time around; a song that I've written that we actually play, so it's not a clip from a movie, it's not a keyboard section, it's an actual song that's about a minute long and that's something that we've never done before."

HAVE YOU PURPOSEFULLY TRIED TO EXPERIMENT A LITTLE WITH THIS RECORD?

"I don't try and do shit; I just do what comes on naturally because if you try to do too many things or venture out too much then you end up writing stuff that's not real, so I always try not to think about it too much and then unusual things just sort of happen, like that intro song I mentioned before, or a couple of other songs that aren't your typical Children Of Bodom songs."

Still a Wild Child. Just happens to be a 39-year-old one...

WELL, TYPICALLY, BODOM SONGS ARE SUPER-HEAVY, FAST-PACED AND FULL OF RIFFS. WILL THERE BE ANY SLOWER TRACKS?

"Yes! There are actually two on this record – the other one is slow/mid-tempo but yes, they're not all fast and heavy!"

THE NEW CHILDREN OF BODOM ALBUM LANDS LATER THIS YEAR VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

SCORPIONS

ROCK YOU LIKE A HURRICANE

In 1984, the pressure was on for Scorpions to write a hit song that'd take them to the next level. What happened next would define their career and stadium rock itself

WORDS: DOM LAWSON • ILLUSTRATION: MARK LEARY

NO ONE COULD ever accuse Scorpions of taking the easy route to success. By the time the Germans were firmly established as one of the world's biggest rock bands, they had put in nearly 20 years of active service. But after many years of incremental progress, 1982's *Blackout* album finally propelled guitarist Rudolf Schenker and his bandmates to the top of the burgeoning 80s heavy metal tree, with irresistible singles *No One Like You* and *Can't Live Without You* turning the band into a major force on US rock radio. Of course, momentum is everything, and so when the band began work on their next album, Rudolf knew instinctively that they needed some more huge, singalong anthems. But *bigger* ones.

"*No One Like You* was the most-played song on US radio in 1982," he recalls. "That was pretty crazy. From there we were able to do our first headlining shows in the States, with Iron Maiden and Girlschool, and we did fantastically well. We were really riding on this high wave, and so I was thinking even bigger... what could I write next, you know?"

The recording sessions for *Blackout* had been plagued with problems, not least vocalist Klaus Meine's temporary departure to deal with a serious vocal issue. But as the band and long-time producer Dieter Dierks began to piece ninth full-length *Love At First Sting* together at Dierks Studios in Stommeln, Germany, it was obvious that the tough times had brought them closer together, pushing everyone involved to greater heights. Newly inspired, Rudolf presented the band with a new song that he'd begun to write while on the Blackout tour: it was big, brash and catchy as hell. All it needed was some lyrics.

"Dieter understood that this song needed the right lyrics. I understood, too, but I couldn't find them!" he laughs. "In the end, we wrote the lyrics for the song *nine* times. Every time Dieter would say 'No!' or 'That isn't working! It just wasn't what it was supposed to be. But then we turned to our drummer, Herman Rarebell. He was always the guy for the double meanings and innuendos, and suddenly the song was there... *'The bitch is hungry, she needs to tell, so give her inches and feed her well.'* It was perfect for the song. It was sexual, it was crazy, it was rocking... it just felt right, you know? You have to remember that this was the 80s!"

"WE CHANGED THE LYRICS NINE TIMES!"

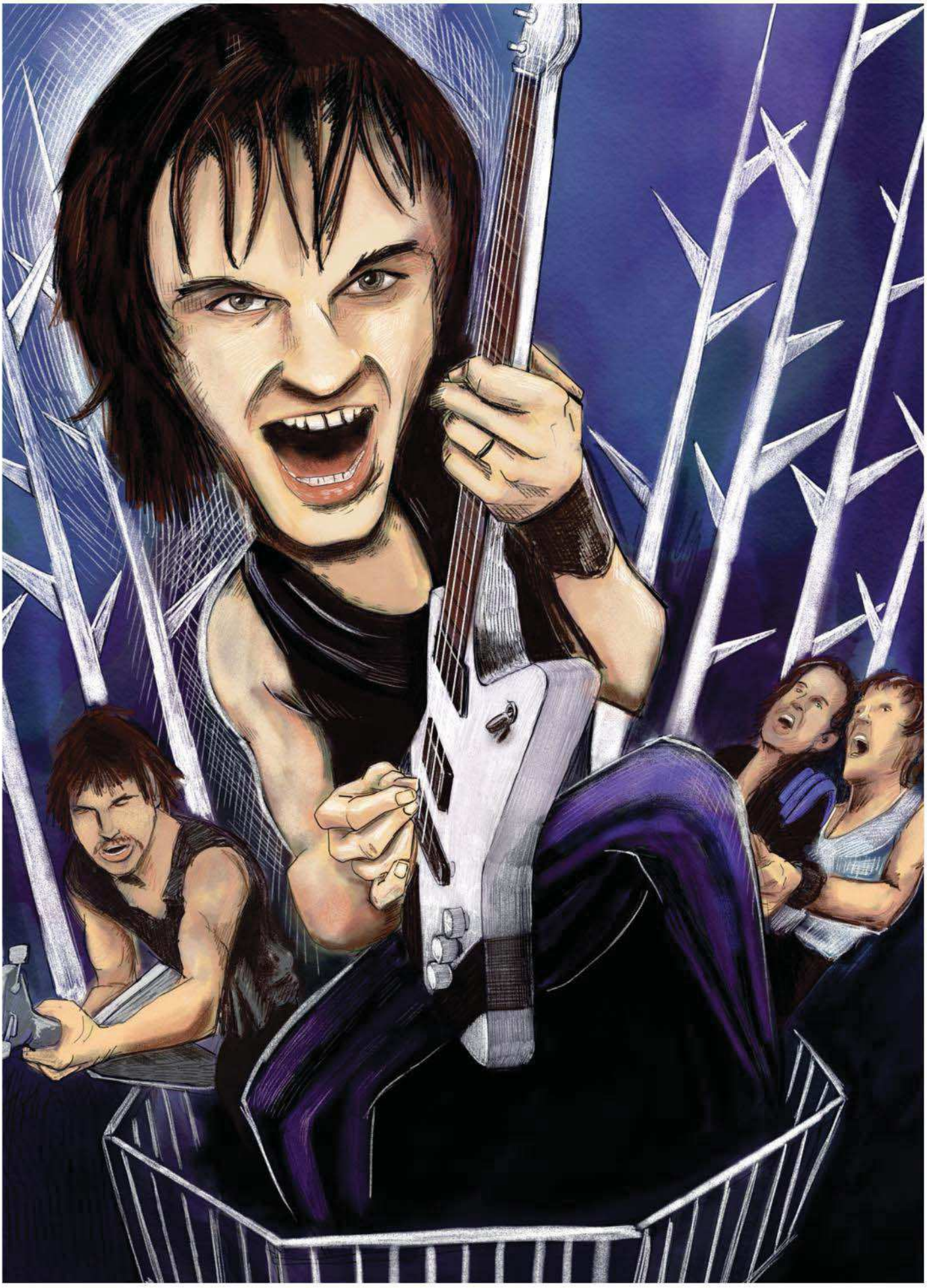
WITH HINDSIGHT, THE lyrics to *Rock You Like A Hurricane* probably wouldn't pass a political sensitivity taste in 2018, but there's no denying that the song's artful combination of mischievous smut and hooks the size of Jupiter made it an instant and colossal hit around the world upon its release as a single in February 1984.

"When our agent heard the song live for the first time, he called me and said, 'This is a hit!'" says Rudolf. "And he was right! We started to notice how strong the song was. It was on the radio in the States and it was in the top 20 charts worldwide. American girls came up to us, saying, 'We love you guys! Rock you like a hurricane!' so it was obviously working. Suddenly you start to hear the song in a different way and you *play* it in a different way because then you understand the true power of the song."

Widely regarded as one of *the* 80s hard rock anthems, *Rock You Like A Hurricane* has been a permanent fixture in Scorpions' live sets for the last 34 years. It has also been used and abused by a never-ending succession of TV shows, films and advertisements; the unerring power of that riff and the ludicrous catchiness of that chorus ensuring that the song is as much part of mainstream culture as it is a revered heavy metal classic.

"I performed at an awards ceremony in Tokyo a while ago with a bunch of different musicians, and we played *Rock You Like A Hurricane*," Rudolf notes. "I noticed when we played the song that it's *still* incredibly strong. It still has that power, even when I play it with other people. When the music and the lyrics meet and they're perfect together, it's synergy. You just can't beat that."

SCORPIONS HEADLINE LONDON'S STONE FREE FESTIVAL ON JUNE 16



NERGAL

BEHEMOTH/ME AND THAT MAN

The Behemoth frontman runs his own barber shop. No, really

WORDS: ALI COOPER

A BARBER SHOP?! SERIOUSLY THOUGH, HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?
"Four years ago, I was sitting with a friend in a beer garden in Warsaw and I said I had some money I'd like to invest somewhere, and she suggested opening a barber shop. I had no idea what one was, so I immediately grabbed my phone and started investigating and I was hooked right away. I was instantly overwhelmed and impressed by how cool the culture is! It's not like a hairdressing salon; a barbers incorporates so many elements of an experience that you're supposed to enjoy to the fullest on every level. It starts with the vibe of the shop, then the music in the background and the ceremony and ritual of the service. It's a really complex and multi-dimensional experience that's supposed to be entertaining, highly relaxing and engaging."

WHAT MAKES YOUR SHOP SPECIAL?
"We were the second barber shop to open in Poland and we're now the biggest barbers chain in the country. It's called Barberian which is a cool play on words I came up with, and we're different from every other shop because we play quality music. When you walk in, you'll hear our theme of classic rock'n'roll with Black Sabbath, Clutch, Judas Priest and Slayer – the first and only Barberian commandment is no shitty music!"

"Yes, yes, one day our hipster army shall arise!"

"WE SERVE BEHEMOTH BEER AND PLAY BLACK SABBATH"

JUST HOW INVOLVED ARE YOU IN THE DAILY RUNNING OF THE SHOP? ARE YOU TRAINED WITH A CUTTHROAT RAZOR, TOO?
"I'm not a trained barber but I'm a huge fan of the culture. In the beginning, I wanted to do a guest spot at a class but becoming a good barber takes serious dedication and I wouldn't like to be just an average barber – life's too short do things in a shitty way. My face is the face of the shop because I'm physically and emotionally involved. Even if I don't have a reason to be there, I'll be hanging out in the Warsaw shop and talking to clients, plus we serve amazing coffee and I always need my coffee! The cool thing is each of our barbers undergo a barista course to learn how to serve coffee properly."

DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING A LITTLE STRONGER THAN COFFEE?
"We serve a wide range of alcohols, wine and whisky, plus the Behemoth beers which are so popular we're having to restock them a lot. We're also planning to release Behemoth gin this year so we'll be selling that in all Barberian shops. There's so much potential and we're still expanding. It's a business I run with passion and people see it's genuine, so they trust us."

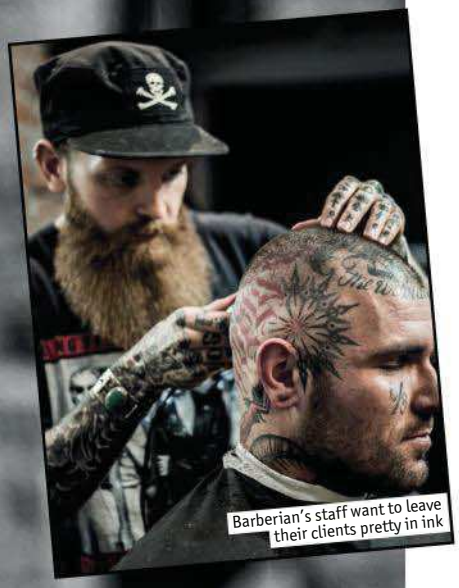
"You have a birthmark. It says '666'"

WHAT DOES YOUR SHOP GIVE BACK TO THE BARBER INDUSTRY?
"Barberian started as part-training academy because Poland was really new to the barber culture, so we wanted to be pioneers and leaders. We drew from almost nomadic barber teachers who travel across the world to teach others; now, after four years, we've gained the experience to teach ourselves. We run popular day classes and we've had great reviews, plus our academy is usually sold out because it runs on small groups of around eight people; that way everyone has the chance to pay attention to how to improve and manage their tools."

ON A SCALE OF 1-10, HOW METAL IS RUNNING YOUR OWN BARBER SHOP?
"I don't care about categories and how metal my life is. All I care about is how genuine I am to myself and I am 100% honest running Barberian – no bullshit, no gimmicks, you get the real shit here!" ✠

BEHEMOTH'S NEW LIVE DVD, *MESSE NOIRE*, IS OUT NOW NUCLEAR BLAST

Nergal: a cut above



Barberian's staff want to leave their clients pretty in ink

When you're in a pinch, inspiration hits

GET INVOLVED

THE KNOW-HOW

"If you're a barber, it's your way of life," Nergal says. Watching videos of professional barbers at work can give you a realistic insight into the skills required. Check out Nergal's Barberian Academy And Barber Shop on their own YouTube channel at www.tinyurl.com/y7bn2oyv

THE TOOLS

In the search for quality tools to begin a barbering career, trust established retailers like Salons Direct (www.salonsdirect.com/barbering) or Barber Blades (www.barberblades.co.uk) to start you on the right track.

THE TRAINING

Accredited qualifications in barbering are the best way to start your career before joining a shop. The London School of Barbering provide a number of courses to suit your level of experience, from beginner to semi-pro. Visit them at www.londonschoolofbarbering.com

BAD WOLVES

Their Cranberries-approved cover of *Zombie* blew up the internet, but its success was bittersweet…

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

SOUNDS LIKE:
Stadium-ready melodic metal powered by huge grooves and massive choruses

FOR FANS OF:
Five Finger Death Punch, Pantera, Stone Sour

LISTEN TO:
Zombie, of course! (and then *Learn To Live*)

LET'S BE HONEST: most metal fans couldn't give a toss about what's going on in the charts these days. But when it's one of our own at the top, you can't help feeling a sense of pride. On the day we sit down with Bad Wolves vocalist Tommy Vext in central London, the Los Angeles-based band are currently Number One in 17 countries with their stirring cover of The Cranberries' classic alt anthem, *Zombie*. It's been just 18 days since things started blowing up for the band, and in that whirlwind few weeks the track has notched up almost seven million streams, has been viewed nearly 20 million times on Youtube and is outselling Ed Sheeran in the US. Put simply: WTF?!

"The label is trying to find stats from the last time this happened and I don't think they even could," Tommy chuckles. "It's pretty incredible. We're the most viral song on Spotify, globally. We're all from an extreme music background so it's been interesting."

Bad Wolves was initially the project of ex-DevilDriver drummer John Boecklin, who experienced a lightbulb moment while watching Faith No More in 2014 and was compelled to form a heavy band which was up for exploring more experimental sensibilities. Over the next few months, the line-up came together, completed by Tommy (ex-Snot and Divine Heresy), ex-God Forbid guitarist Doc Coyle, ex-In This Moment bassist Kyle Konkiel and guitarist Chris Cain from Bury Your Dead. And under the management of Five Finger Death Punch's Zoltan Bathory, the band created an irresistibly lean hybrid that recalls the devastating groove of Pantera and FFDP's huge melodies, with a juddering djent backbone.

"THE CRANBERRIES' DOLORES LEFT ME A VOICEMAIL THE NIGHT BEFORE SHE DIED"

"Our previous bands were traditional metal and we played with members who were less willing to be experimental, or just incapable of it," explains Tommy. "They had limitations that this band doesn't really have. For the melodies and vocal structures I really leaned into different genres, from R'n'B and hip-hop, to pop and gospel, even Busta Rhymes, Bjork and The Cranberries… which is how *Zombie* came to be on the record."

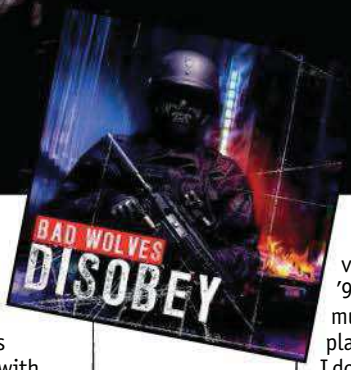
Describing himself as a long-term fan of The Cranberries, Tommy admits that Bad Wolves' sudden success has been bittersweet given that the single landed soon after the sudden death of Cranberries' singer Dolores O'Riordan, who passed away in January. Her passing was all the more difficult for the band

There's much more to Bad Wolves than *Zombie*, but it's a great place to start

given the late singer had originally agreed to lend her vocals to their version of *Zombie*, but died on the day she was due to head into the studio to record them.

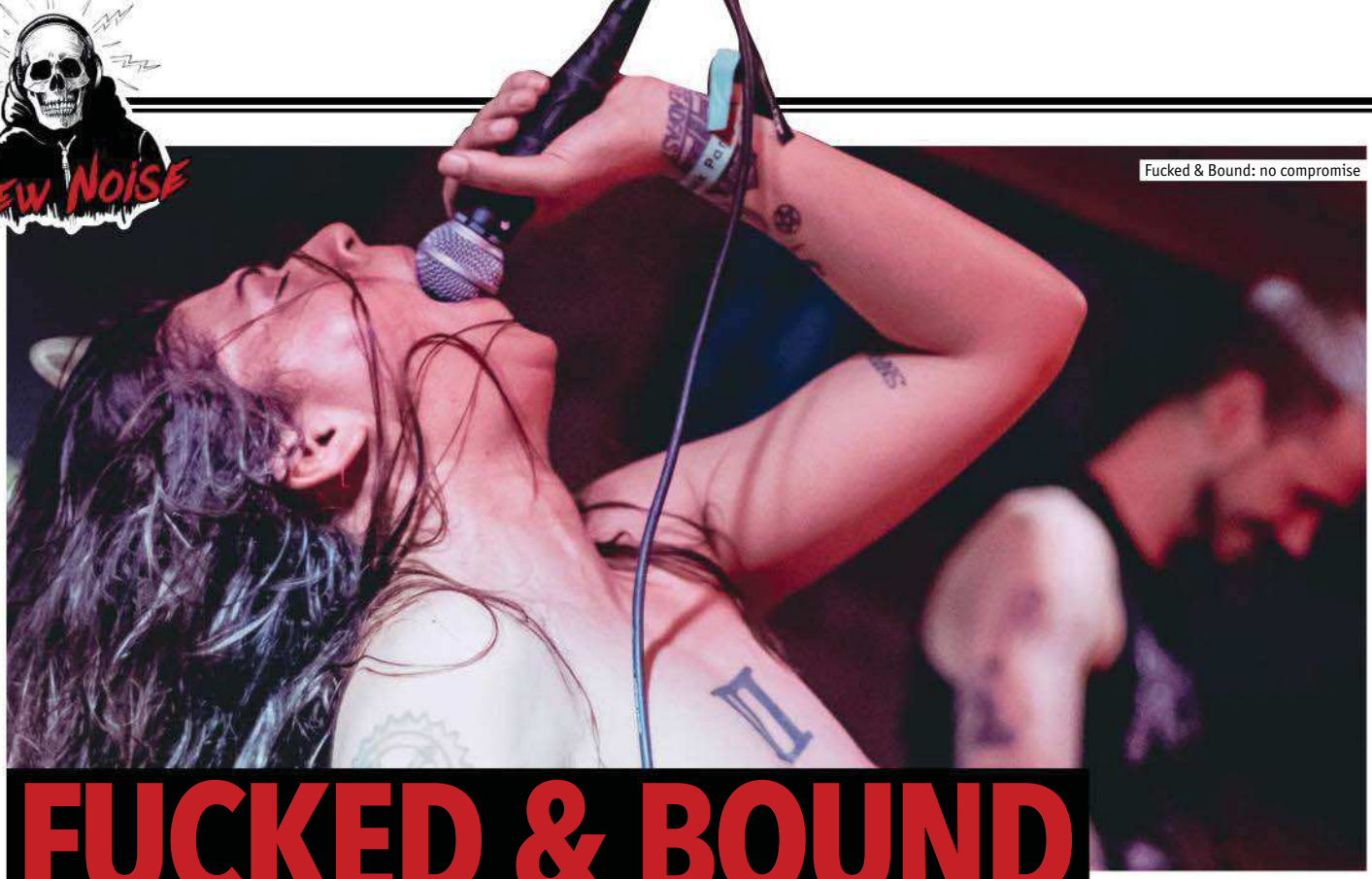
"She left me voice messages the night before she passed away," says Tommy, sadly. "We were all heartbroken and the song almost got shelved, but ultimately we decided to turn the song into a tribute and donate the proceeds to her three children. It was the only right thing to do; we're not trying to capitalise on the situation. We had a deep, abiding respect for this woman, this band and their body of work and we were honoured that she gave us her stamp of approval. It's still resonating with people who heard the original and with people who've never heard it before. A great song is a great song and a great song is timeless."

Now the band are releasing their debut full-length, *Disobey*, which perfectly balances well-drilled, hard rock anthemia with technically-charged metal, executed with the kind of devastating precision that can only come from a group of musicians who have been in the game for years. And with humongous tours alongside Five Finger, Shinedown and Breaking Benjamin in the bag over the next year and the hype machine working in their favour, the band have taken off in ways they could have only dreamed of a mere couple of months ago. But are they worried they'll always be known as 'that band who covered *Zombie*'?



"I don't have any fear," says Tommy vehemently. "I started my first band in '96 and I've been playing underground music my entire life. I'll never stop playing music, it's part of who I am. I don't do it for money or notoriety or fame. I do it because I have to because if I didn't, somewhere along the lines of my life I probably would have killed myself. I'm a recovered drug addict and alcoholic. I've been sober for almost nine years. When I was born my mother was a drug addict and my twin brother and I were abandoned when we were born. I'm not concerned with what anyone thinks. Music has literally saved my life." ✠

***DISOBEY* IS OUT NOW VIA ELEVEN SEVEN**



Fucked & Bound: no compromise

FUCKED & BOUND

Fed up of watching misogynistic assholes ruin everything, this Seattle crew channelled their rage into one of 2018's most savage hardcore albums

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

SOUNDS LIKE:
Short, insanely intense bursts of socially conscious punk-fuelled grinding

FOR FANS OF:
Helpless, Cocaine Piss, Napalm Death

LISTEN TO:
#GTFO

"FOR SOME TIME you could say that heavy genres were thought of as a boys' club," suggests Lisa Mungo, vocalist in Seattle-based grind/crossover crew Fucked & Bound. "Now there's interest in art being made by strong women, and for good reason. One might suggest that in a broader sense, if you only listen to one thing, it's going to get boring. One might also suggest that women have been making great music the whole time, and it's partly the responsibility of listeners to demand it and drive the interest. In the end, women and those who support them are making a big push, and we're starting to see a demand that reflects that."

Now, bands as varied as Chelsea Wolfe, Code Orange, Oathbreaker, Employed To Serve and Myrkyr, are making sublime music while eschewing perspectives of what it means to be a woman in metal, and refusing to compromise the extremity of their art. In a world where we've been told that there is no new ground to mine in modern music, is just being yourself the most original approach to take? Is that heavy music's final taboo?

"I feel what you're throwing down," Lisa replies, thoughtfully, before adding: "We must then ask, is it the last taboo because 'heavy' belongs to men? Do men have to pass the torch for women to be allowed to have deep, heavy emotion and express it? What if the last bit of shock theatre is watching people reckon with the ideas they've built their identities around? Art can be fun or challenging. It's about what you're willing to put into it, hard you're willing to think about it in the process. Four dudes playing some killer thrash can be super-entertaining, I get that it doesn't have to be a deep, philosophical experience, but female entertainers in the heavy music scene and beyond are doing both. Once everyone gets over the shock, we can get back to enjoying the show."

It'd be ideal if it were that simple, but you only have to recall the whining in certain sections of our scene when Venom Prison released their debut album, *Animus*, which featured art showing three women castrating a male rapist. Isn't that the exact kind of tableaux that has depicted women in various similar states over the years in the death metal scene?

"It's definitely a double standard," nods Lisa. "So it shocked people and made them feel uncomfortable. That's a better use of shock than some assclown in corpsepaint throwing a Sieg Heil for the approval of internet trolls. Maybe it will make people ask themselves *why* they felt uncomfortable."

It's that kind of determined state of mind that's driven Fucked & Bound's debut album, *Suffrage*. A 21-minute ball of sonic fury that takes the white-hot blueprint of early hardcore and grindcore and gives Lisa the chance to express her frustrations over the top of it.

"I wrote about things I've always found fascinating or troubling," explains Lisa of the album's lyrical narrative. "Nihilism, wage slavery, mainstream misogyny... and it appears at least a couple of people feel the same way I do, but with that comes responsibility. The lyrics were always meant to strike more of a conversational tone, rather than provide answers, but if someone wants clarity on something I say or do I have no problem engaging in a direct, meaningful exchange."

One of the album's most powerful moments, the seething *#GTFO*, is Lisa detailing the trials of being a woman working behind a bar, as she does when she's not fronting Fucked & Bound.

"People get drunk and forget their humanity," she sighs. "They become verbally and sometimes physically abusive to service personnel. People who get abused on a daily basis then forget their own humanity. It's a fucking vicious cycle and it's sad that we don't do more to protect the interests of industry workers. That makes it extra-cathartic to play live."

The world is changing, our scene is changing, and Fucked & Bound are the perfect soundtrack to it.

"YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AN ASSCLOWN IN CORPSEPAINT TO SHOCK PEOPLE"

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Valis Ablaze: the more things change... the more interesting they become

VALIS ABLAZE

This Bristolian crew are shrugging off the djent scene for a whole new breed of technicality

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

SOUNDS LIKE:
Complex and hypnotic prog-tech with endless ambition

FOR FANS OF:
Tesseract, Dead Letter Circus, Karnivool

LISTEN TO:
Paradox

IF THERE'S ONE end of the metal spectrum that has little patience for chasing trends and playing it safe, it's the prog and tech scenes, where cerebral tendencies are revered above all else. Bristolian progressive crew Valis Ablaze started life as a djent-fuelled proposition in 2012, when the scene was approaching saturation. However, quickly realising the key to longevity would be finding a sound of their own, the band underwent a line-up change and sonic overhaul. The result was an expansive sound that married Tesseract's more ethereal sensibilities with the groove-prog of Monuments.

"We wanted to break down barriers and remove all the standard things that people expect," explains Phil Owen, who joined the band on vocals in 2016. "We were like, 'If we wanted to sound like any band, who would that be?' A lot of them weren't djent – they were bands like Dead Letter Circus, Tesseract and Disperse. Now our sound is melodic ambience mixed with riffs, so you get a contrast between dreamy sections and something hard-hitting. We have heavy riffs and a progressive metal sound, but there's a lot more layering going on. It's our own sound but with a lot of pieces we like from our major influences."

"WE WANTED TO BREAK DOWN BARRIERS"

Since completing their volte-face, the quintet have released their *Insularity* EP, signed to Long Branch Records and supported bands like Tesseract, Sikth and The Contortionist. Now, with debut album *Boundless*, it's very clear how far they've come in a short space of time.

"Yeah, that's what a lot of people in the industry are saying, too," agrees Phil. "For us, it's happened really quickly. Because *Insularity* was quite a drastic change in the sound, I think a lot of people were shocked by that and we got a lot of hype."

Packed with simmering soundscapes and ephemeral rhythms and awash with strings, synths and pianos, *Boundless* is an ambitious concept album and an otherworldly mix of off-kilter riffs and radiant melodies. Featuring a vocal guest spot from the band's producer, Drewsif Stalin, and guitar solos from Sithu Aye and Reece Fullwood from Mask Of Judas, who have added cosmic guitar work to an already scintillating mix, it represents a step up in every respect from the band's EP and sounds altogether too accomplished to be the work of a band still at the beginning of their career.

"It's based on the sleep cycle," says Phil, explaining the concept of the album. "It's a fascinating topic and there's a lot of directions we could have taken that story. But lyrically, it's about a protagonist who goes through the different stages of sleep and meets a guide in their dream who takes them through the past, present and future. We can learn from dreams; it's essentially our own imagination and sub-conscious trying to speak to us. I think, sometimes, symbols and visions in dreams can mean something to us in waking life. They can be really powerful things. We've built the whole album around that concept; we've got repeating patterns in the music, the songs run into each other and there's a slow build that peaks with the heaviest track, *Paradox*. Right after that, you have the lightest track, *Reflections*, so there's this huge contrast of being in a really deep sleep then waking up from an intense dream into reality."

Despite their tech roots, these days Valis Ablaze are a little trickier to pigeon-hole. And although Phil welcomes this as a consequence of the band's progression, he confirms they'll always be a tech band at heart. "While we push boundaries and evolve the sound, we'll always be involved in the scene in some way," he says. "It's where we started and so it will always hold a special place for us. It's great to be still part of it but it's also nice to take a bit of a step out. After this, the sound might change again, but right now we're where we want to be." ✠

***BOUNDLESS* IS OUT NOW VIA LONG BRANCH**

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ATTAN

They may come from Norway, but this quintet's brand of blackened noise is a whole new monster

WORDS: HYWEL DAVIES

SOUNDS LIKE:
The angst of black metal in its ugliest form

FOR FANS OF:
Converge, Conjurer, Employed To Serve

LISTEN TO:
Black Liquid Marrow

"WE HAVE THIS phrase we like to say: 'We're the sound of people sucking the marrow out of their own bones,'" laughs Attan bassist Fritz Pettersen as he casually sips on his green tea. As he sits completely unfazed after uttering the most metal thing anyone has ever said, we're pretty sure we'll never sleep again after hearing it.

Moulded by the bleak wintery darkness of the Norwegian Arctic Circle, Attan aren't so much a band that you can easily whack on while hoovering the flat but will more likely have you quivering naked in the foetal position in the corner. Their 2015 EP, *From Nothing*, was a raw helping of despairing blackened hardcore that is yet to be truly recognised outside of the underground. This vile sound is steadily crawling from the depths into the metal consciousness, stemming from the blueprint the likes of Converge and Neurosis have previously laid down.

While the thought of what sort of damage a full-length album would have on your cranium and furniture is sure to terrify insurance companies everywhere, Fritz seems to see Attan's objective differently to what we expected while discussing the forthcoming debut.

"Playing really heavy and fast isn't the issue. It's not really that hard either – this is not a sport, so that's not the challenge. For us, it's making something that has impact. Making it interesting is as much a part of the music as the aggression," he says, explaining how the band approached this record. "That said, aggression is important to us. I'm a firm believer in channelling aggression from the negative to the positive and that's a really big part of this band."

From what he tells *Hammer*, Norway has once again become a melting pot of creativity, as its hardcore, black metal, even jazz scenes frequently fuse, and being heavy for the sake of it is seen as constricting that creativity. Given the devastating blow *From Nothing* deals out, the lesson here is this: take care of the art and the heaviness will follow.

"It's really intense," he says, affirming the yet-to-be named album will undoubtedly shatter a few spines. "That's the key word there: intense. That's when we know we're on the right path, when it's hard to breathe."

"IT'S NOT ABOUT BEING HEAVY AND FAST. IT'S ABOUT IMPACT"

Looks like one member of Attan has had a "beautiful, intense beating" already

Though working with producer and film composer Christian Wibe, who scored the cult zombie classic *Dead Snow* (a film that guitarist Mathis Mathisen also worked on as a cinematographer), there have obviously been a few challenges along the way. Ferocious filth such as this thrives in a tight, condensed spaces and could potentially lose that impact if stretched too far. As proven with their seven-and-a-half-minute metallic doom march *Edward*, they're more than capable of dealing out the pain over fair distances.

"When you have that fast, intense hardcore stuff, trying to make that work within the limits of say 40 minutes or so, there are some challenges. We know that this is intense music and we know that no one likes to be beaten for hours. But we had a really clear vision of where we wanted to go and it's even beautiful and mellow at times. We ended up surprising ourselves. I'm not going to use the word intelligent, but we've put some thought into what we're trying to say. So, you could say it's a beautiful, intense beating."

ATTAN WILL RELEASE THEIR NEW ALBUM LATER THIS YEAR

KING GOAT

You don't want to share a stage with these gloom-mongers, trust us

King Goat: welcome to their weird world

WORDS: MATT MILLS

SOUNDS LIKE:
Lengthy, gritty gloom with the darkest of operatic melodies

FOR FANS OF:
Candlemass, Black Sabbath, Mastodon

LISTEN TO:
Doldrum Sentinels

BACK IN FEBRUARY, doom metal legends Paradise Lost toured the UK. With a canon of 15 studio albums and an array of fan-favourite anthems, the Yorkshire titans are always hugely difficult to outdo in a live setting.

However, their opening band, King Goat, pulled it off. Shrouded in Sith-like hoods, ambient lighting and swirling incense, the Brighton quintet dominated the stage with grand, ominous melodies and pummelling musicianship.

"The band have been going for about six years, but it's only the last couple of years that we've started to think about the visuals," says lead guitarist Petros. "We want to be mysterious, but without being too quirky or being anonymous. It's just more for the visual perspective. It blends everything together."

Beyond their attention-demanding performances, their enigmatic and cinematic aura is carried with them off-stage, too, as they intentionally keep the meanings behind their lyrics and band name unknown.

"It's not just being mysterious for the sake of being mysterious; it gives a bit more freedom of interpretation," Petros explains. "I know definitely that Trim [vocals] likes his lyrics to give the audience creative freedom, like when you're reading a book and you can think whatever you want out of the imagery. Our mystery comes more out of feeding creativity rather than going, 'Ooh, look at that! Isn't it creepy and mysterious?'"

"WE GIVE THE AUDIENCE CREATIVE FREEDOM!"

King Goat's charismatic ambiguity is front and centre in their new, sophomore album, *Debt Of Aeons*. The seven epic suites blend Black Sabbath-like pacing with polyrhythmic unpredictability and the muscular melodies of NWOBHM.

"We call it progressive doom metal," says Petros. "Progressive because of the long songs, but also in the old-school way, like Pink Floyd and King Crimson. It's highly technical. On the other hand, we're doom because there's nothing particularly high tempo. Some elements are quite theatrical and very dramatic."

King Goat are ready to dominate the doom metal subsect, with tracks that are both adventurous and primal, and a riveting live show to match. However, the five-piece refuse to become complacent and are still eyeing up ways to continue their expansive evolution.

"We want to be an audio/visual experience," states Petros. "We want to work more with lighting. We might have a few more props. We want to create a theatrical vibe, to immerse the viewers." Wherever they go from here, King Goat will be stealing the show for a long while yet. Join their cult.

***DEBT OF AEONS* IS OUT NOW VIA AURAL**

Neshiima: proof that you can choose a new family

NESHIIMA

Liam Hesslewood was ostracised by his community for his love of music. With Neshiima, he's turned his pain into positivity

WORDS: JAMES WEAVER

SOUNDS LIKE:
Electronica-charged rap metal with a message of hope

FOR FANS OF:
Linkin Park, Enter Shikari, The One Hundred

LISTEN TO:
Believe

WE ALL HAVE a past. The experiences and events we undergo mould who we are today. No one knows this better than Liam Hesslewood of Scottish quartet Neshiima. Dig beneath the surface of their explosive new EP, *Purple*, and it portrays a man who has undergone one hell of a journey.

Growing up in a Jehovah's Witnesses community, Liam was subject to strict ideologies and practices. With a belief system that dictates society is under the corrupting influence of Satan, it is a religion where something as simple as celebrating a birthday, let alone listening to metal, can result in excommunication. As Liam's conscience swirled between what he knew and what he wanted as a young metalhead, he found the door back home slammed firmly shut.

"I wondered if I was being selfish, and if my lifestyle choices were something I should forego for the sake of my faith," he explains. "But when I tried to return I was rebuffed, and now I don't have anything to do with my immediate family. I feel that the kind thing is always the right thing to do – it's too small a planet to close doors on people like that."

Liam persisted with his passion, forming Neshiima by hooking up with four fellow metal fans from the Glasgow area. Now, having made ripples in the ocean of the UK rock scene with their electronica-charged metal, it seems a tsunami is imminent. *Purple* is the product of a band who've experimented with their musical DNA, pulling from the electronic elements and anthemic vibe of Linkin Park and the gargantuan guitar tones found in tech-metal. The result is a razor-sharp sound and a damn uplifting experience.

"We were welcomed into the UK tech-metal community with our first EP [2015's *Beware Of Gifts*]. But, over the past three years, we've gone from making music we feel we *should* make to making music that we always really *wanted* to make."

Purple is billed as the first in a trilogy of EPs, and Neshiima's message of unity and hope is here to stay. With mental health being such a hot topic in the musical world today, *Purple*'s poignant subject matter is sure to reach inside listeners.

"It's important to know there are people there [for you]," Liam adds. "Even with myself, without my immediate family, you realise over time there are more people there for you than you originally thought. We should have a heightened state of awareness for the needs of others. My own selfishness has never benefited me. I've found, though, that in putting others first, you tend to learn more about yourself. Put simply, we do really need one another." ✠

"I HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH MY FAMILY"

***PURPLE* IS OUT NOW**

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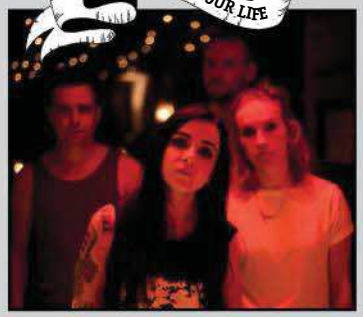

PRETTY PISTOL

Channelling Gallows and Milk Teeth in their snotty, punked-up garage rock, these Londoners have ripped the capital to shreds and are about to hit the rest of the country. Don't miss 'em.

LISTEN TO: *Cry Wolf*

THE PLOT IN YOU

This Ohio four-piece excel in shiny, polished metalcore, so if you're looking for the kind of syrupy hooks that brought the world We Came As Romans and The Amity Affliction, these are the boys you're looking for.

LISTEN TO: *Not Just Breathing*

THE DALI THUNDERING CONCEPT

With swaggering grooves, deathcore-infused breakdowns and a flurry of leftfield turns that include electronica and even jazz, this is not a band you'll be able to pigeonhole easily. Check out new album *Savages* now.

LISTEN TO: *Ink*

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GRAVITY

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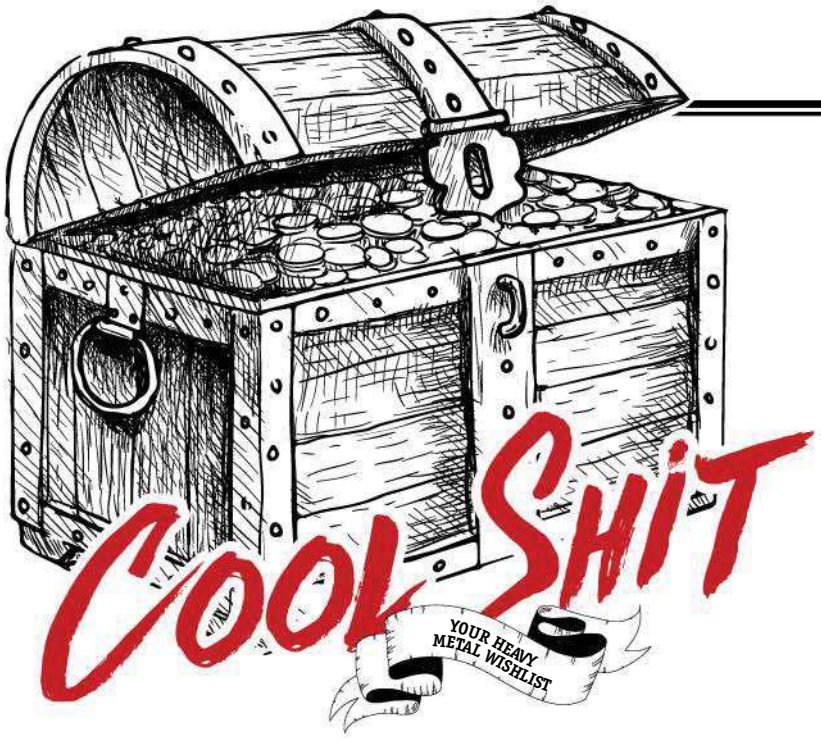

WONDER WOMAN SHIELD

£77.66

We're not exactly sure why you'd need a brass and leather replica of the shield used by Gal Gadot in the awesome *Wonder Woman* film of last year… but, just being honest here, we definitely want one regardless.

HTTP://TINYURL.COM/DIANA-SHIELD

GRIM REAPER CHOCOLATE

£3.95

We're all going to die, aren't we? So, we might as well enjoy some delicious chocolate while we're here on this planet. But beware, this Grim Reaper chocolate might look like your standard bar of Cadbury's, but it's infused with Naga chilies that will end you!

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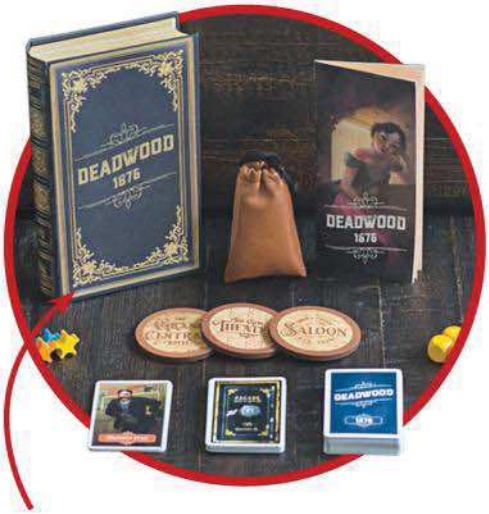
IHSAHN T-SHIRT

£15.99

Ihsahn is a genius, we all know that FFS, and we're always excited to listen to whatever is fermenting around in his brain. If you want to show your respect for the man, this new t-shirt featuring the artwork of his new album, *Àmr*, will do it.

HTTP://TINYURL.COM/IHSAHN-TEE



DEADWOOD 1876 GAME

£16.50

If ever you've longed to be an outlaw in the dangerous days of the Wild West then this brand-new *Deadwood 1876* safecracking game is the closest that you'll ever get. And with the added bonus of you not being bitten by a rattlesnake or dying of diarrhoea.

HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/DEADWOOD-1876

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING: THE COMPLETE RECORDINGS BOX SET

RHINO

£159.99

How do you make one third of the greatest fantasy movie soundtrack of all time even more epic? With a package so sumptuous it'd be worth walking to Mordor and back for. Housed in a fancy collectors' box, the deluxe version of this special set comes complete with Howard Shore's score across five scarlet vinyl, plus accompanying liner notes, and a pull-out of JRR Tolkien's iconic map – or at least one third of it, suggesting we'll be seeing similar treatments for the other two parts of the trilogy soon. Limited to 5,000 copies, we imagine these will last about as long as a hobbit at an Uruk-hai barbecue. Pre-order yours now so you can get lost in those timeless Middle-Earth jams.

HTTP://TINYURL.COM/FELLOWSHIP-DELUXE

SLAYER REPENTLESS 6.66-INCH BOX SET

NUCLEAR BLAST
£46.99

Huntington Park's thrash legends may be bowing out, but they're doing it in mightily impressive style, thanks to this box set featuring their final album in the form of six, diabolically sized 6.66-inch singles in red, gold and black vinyl with an inlay booklet to boot. It's enough to make your head implode.
HTTP://TINYURL.COM/SLAYER-VINYL-666

SKINDRED T-SHIRT

£15.68

It's always exciting when Skindred have a new album out. This shirt combines two of our favourite things – the 'dred and cats in sunglasses – and comes in five sizes: S, M, L, XL... and BIG TINGS! THAT'S THE NAME OF THEIR NEW ALBUM, GUYS! LOL!
HTTP://TINYURL.COM/BIG-TINGS-TEE

LOUISE LEMÓN T-SHIRT

£19.47

Sweden-based 'death gospel' preacher Louise Lemón is going to be a big deal very soon, and you can tell everyone you were an early devotee by donning this t-shirt featuring stunning graphics from her debut album, *Purge* – wrongly slanted accent and all...
HTTP://TINYURL.COM/LEMON-TEE

CALEB SCOFIELD BUNDLE

£30

The tragic and untimely passing of Cave In, Zozobra and Old Man Gloom bassist/vocalist Caleb Scofield has rocked the music community, but he left behind a wife and two children as well. Celebrate a huge talent and aid his family, too, with one of the many OMG/Zozobra bundles being offered in his wake.
HTTP://TINYURL.COM/CALEB-REMEMBERED

EXODUS LOGO BEANIE

£5.49

When we think of a banging head we often think about Bay Area thrash overlords Exodus. Have two things ever been so synonymous? We don't think so, and now you can bang your head proudly emblazoned with the iconic logo for extra power.
HTTP://TINYURL.COM/EXODUS-BEANIE

KITSOUND IMMERSE HEADPHONES

£59

If you're looking for a decent pair of noise-cancelling 'phones that won't break the bank, you could do a lot worse than these bad boys from KitSound. They boast a bluetooth connection that means you can go wireless while cranking everything up to 11.
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WAR MACHINE RING

£155

This is an essential piece for any In This Moment fan: a collaborative piece between Seventh Circle Artwork and ITM guitarist Randy Weitzel. Made from solid sterling silver to represent his onstage War Machine persona, it's metal as fuck... literally and figuratively.
HTTP://TINYURL.COM/WAR-MACHINE-RING

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Arguably the best reboot of modern times, the *Planet Of The Apes* movie series has now come to high-end VR with this immersive quest for simian supremacy. Taking the role of an ape breaking out of a science facility, you'll be climbing, jumping and shooting the fuck out of stuff like there's no tomorrow. Which there probably won't be.
HTTP://WWW.APESVR.COM

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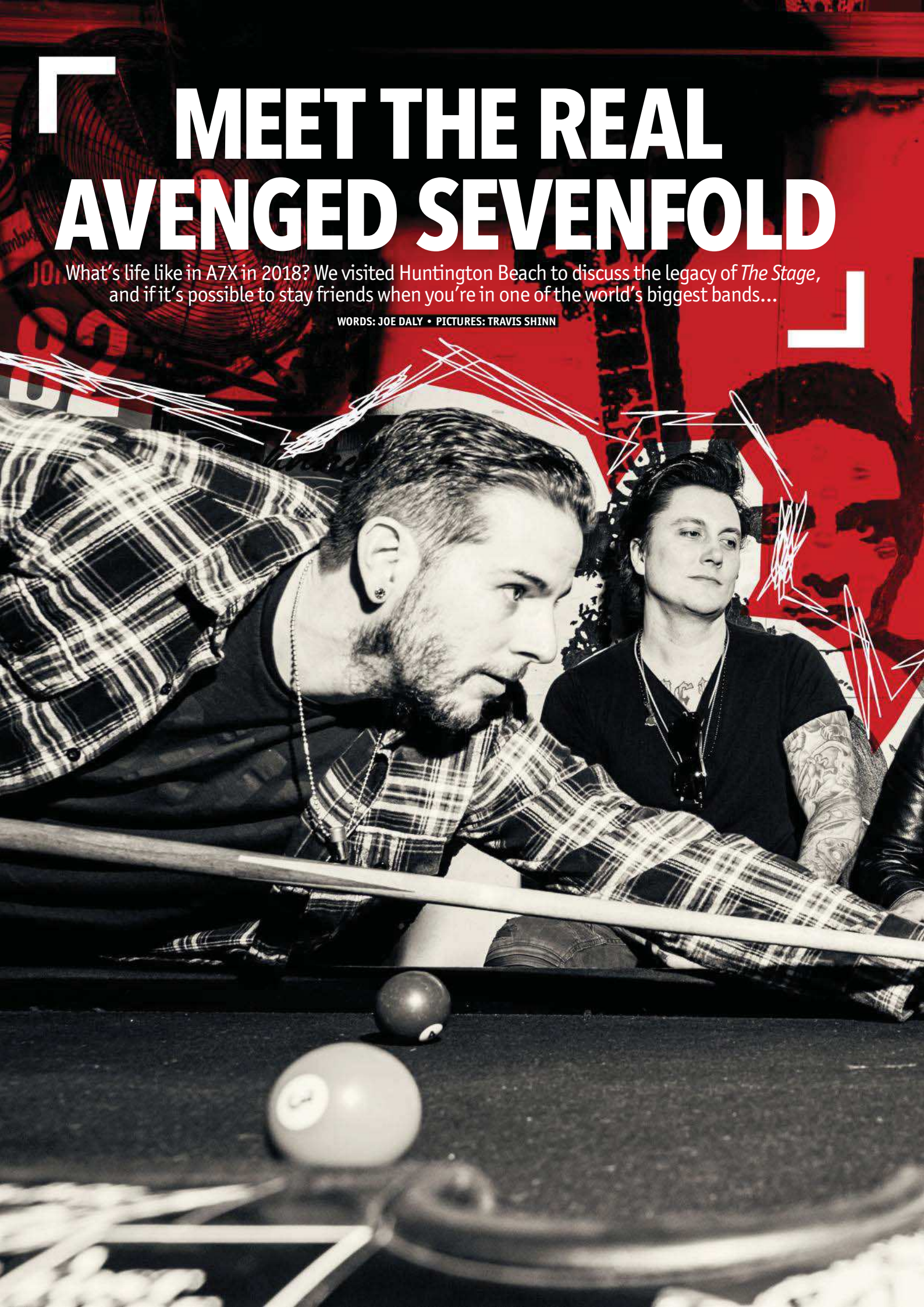
MEET THE REAL AVENGED SEVENFOLD

What's life like in A7X in 2018? We visited Huntington Beach to discuss the legacy of *The Stage*, and if it's possible to stay friends when you're in one of the world's biggest bands...

WORDS: JOE DALY • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN



ARTWORK
BY:
GORDO
Canon

Whisky, pizza and punk rock. As far as dive bars go, we've hit the jackpot. Set in a strip mall about five miles in from the coast, Johnny's Saloon occupies hallowed status in the seaside town of Huntington Beach, California. As joyful torrents of punk, outlaw country and soul bump on the jukebox, locals devour pizza and beer, surrounded by walls festooned with kitschy art, punk slogans and a black and white mural of the Ramones. A noisy pack of local dudes slam shots and shoot pool in the corner next to a sign that cautions, "If you don't like steak, stiff drinks and Johnny Cash… don't let the door hit you in the ass!"

With so much stimuli, you'd be forgiven for not paying too much attention to the guys playing pool, but if you did, you'd notice that the dudes are in fact Huntington Beach's most famous locals, Avenged Sevenfold. Chatty and unguarded, it's like they're hiding in plain sight; there are no fans, nobody is hitting them up for selfies and they're attired like most of the other patrons. In fact, if one didn't know better, they'd have a rough time trying to pick out the rockstars here. After introductions are made, we point this out to singer M. Shadows, who demurs, saying, "I don't feel famous at all. I think I'm more famous online than I am in my everyday life. I think that Brian [Haner, AKA Synyster Gates] gets recognised the most out of all of us because he kind of dresses the part. A lot of people will come up to Brian while I'm standing there and have no clue who I am." Does he ever speak up? "No," he laughs, "I'll usually take the picture for them."

We impose on Shadows to skip his next turn at the pool table for a chat at the bar. There are no subjects off limits, nor does anything that we discuss provoke a defensive response from the singer, although we'll stump him twice before we're done.

Avenged Sevenfold were formed in this very town, nearly 20 years ago, by Shadows (born Matthew Sanders), guitarists Syn and Zacky Vengeance (born Zachary Baker), bassist Johnny Christ (born Jonathan Seward) and drummer Jimmy 'The Rev' Sullivan, who tragically passed away in 2009. Former Bad Religion drummer Brooks Wackerman, who has been keeping time with Avenged for three years now, is also at home around these parts, having been born and raised in nearby Long Beach. With year-round idyllic weather, 10 miles of sun-drenched beach running up its coast and a lively downtown area lined with bars, restaurants and clubs, it's not hard to ponder why the band remain here, rather than moving an hour north to Los Angeles — the epicentre of the music industry.

"I try to stay away from the industry as much as possible," Shadows explains. "I like being around my friends; a lot of them still live here. My parents are there, my family's there and when you have kids, parents are great babysitters! Here in Huntington, in the middle of winter I can take my kids to the beach. You travel around the rest of the world but there's just something about consistent, 70˚ weather that's nice."

"WE HAD A BACKLASH ON *CITY OF EVIL*, *HAIL TO THE KING* AND *THE STAGE*"

AVENGED AREN'T AFRAID OF TAKING RISKS WITH THEIR SOUND, AND THEIR FANBASE

It's hard to picture these words coming from the likes of James Hetfield, Axl Rose or Dave Mustaine, but then Shadows' wholesale lack of pretence only underscores how different he is from his contemporaries. And make no mistake, those men are very much his contemporaries. Behind the power of Avenged's mindblowing live shows and a parade of seven progressively ambitious studio albums, the Orange County metallers have notched a 2018 Grammy nomination for Best Rock Song (*The Stage*), scooped up a boatload of awards, headlined Download and sold more than eight million albums worldwide. As many of the titans of the 80s and 90s recede into the dark annals of metal history, only Avenged Sevenfold, alongside Slipknot, stand poised as obvious successors to the throne. Which wasn't always the case. In their earlier years, the band earned a reputation for being arrogant and for a laddish enthusiasm for sex, drugs and rock'n'roll — perks of the job, but qualities that rarely promote a band's longevity.

Today the guys are almost unbelievably down-to-earth and lead much quieter lives.

"We've got our families on the road most of the time," says Shadows. "We've outgrown it. No one has a problem in this band. The Rev obviously had a problem and we tried to fix that and we learned a lot through that. I'm fucking 36 now. Snorting cocaine while I have two kids doesn't sound good."

Avenged's co-founder and original drummer was gifted with preternatural musical talent and a larger-than-life persona, and his untimely death in 2009 from an overdose continues to cast a long shadow across the band. By now it's known that each of the original members wear a metal vial containing a piece of The Rev's drumkit as a testament to their friend's memory. It dangles from Shadows' neck as we chat.

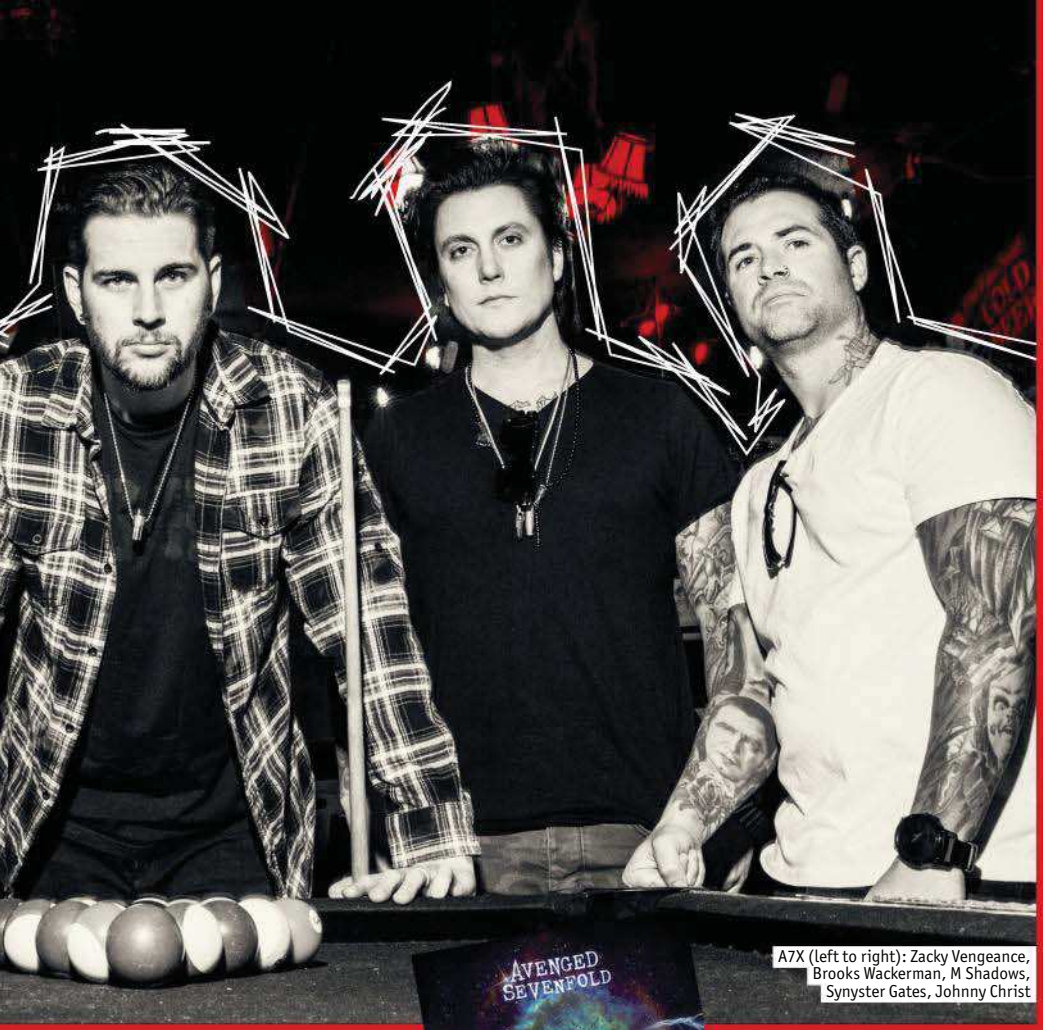
We ask Shadows, if he could have a conversation with The Rev today, what would he say and more importantly, what would he like to hear? For the first time today, the singer is stumped. "Man… fuck, man…" He looks away for a bit and continues, "I'd just talk to him about the good times we had. I'd talk to him about my kids. I'd tell him that I explained to my kids who Jimmy is and they talk about him like they've met him. It's crazy. I'd just want to hear him give me some cool musical ideas. Because that guy was such a badass. He was a genius."

The band are currently entering the final throes of their promotional cycle in support of *The Stage* – their epic but controversial concept album about space and time. "I think we kind of misfired there," Shadows acknowledges.

Trying to shock the system, Avenged recorded the record in secret, sneak-releasing it on October 28, 2016 to the baffled reception of unwitting fans and media. It was also their first record on

You've gotta be *this* tall to play pool with us…

Cue? Syn don't need no stinkin' cue!



A7X (left to right): Zacky Vengeance, Brooks Wackerman, M Shadows, Synyster Gates, Johnny Christ

new label Capitol Records and the first to feature Brooks, who had officially joined the band in 2015.

Immediately available for streaming, *The Stage* heralded an unambiguous commitment to exploring a new progressive-oriented direction – an artistic decision that polarised an already-confused fanbase. Shadows believes the album is still finding its audience, explaining, "I think it will stand the test of time in terms of Avenged's legacy and I think that at some point it will be a lot of people's favourite record. I just think that when you're in the middle of the process of writing a record and you know that things are going to be a little complex or a little over people's heads, then you've got to know that a backlash is coming. And it did. But you know that going into it. I just wish that we didn't do so many crazy things at once."

It wasn't the first time they'd experienced a backlash. In fact, virtually every release has generated feverish dismay within sections of their own fanbase – a near-inevitability when one considers the many stylistic left turns the band have taken over the years. But in the music business these days, criticism is the inevitable price of ambition. Matt agrees, noting: "I feel that all of the initial backlashes that we've had, people have grown into it. They try it on and see how it fits. The backlash to *City Of Evil* was insane. And then the next one was insane because it wasn't *City Of Evil*. The next one was actually fine because Jimmy had died.

We didn't get much of a backlash because I think that people felt bad for us. But then when *Hail To The King* came out, there was a huge backlash and then *The Stage* came out and there was more backlash. The different thing on the backlash with *The Stage*, though, was it was the first time that we had a great critical response and more of a fan backlash."

Across the bar, roars of laughter and clinking of beers is heard from the rest of the band. Watching the guys interact, one gets the sense of a very real and natural camaraderie. It's what's *not* happening that tips you off — nobody's head is buried in his phone, none of the guys are sitting off by themselves, nor do any of them look like they'd rather be somewhere else. They joke, bust chops, swap stories and laugh a *lot*. And living so close together, they see each other all the time.

"We drink, hang out, party," Shadows says. "If there's any wedding for one of our friends, any bachelor party or any night out or dinner, we're all there. My wife's twin sister is married to Brian and we live five minutes' walk from each other. We see each other all the time. I saw Zack at the gym today. I saw Johnny walking down the street with his son when I was going to play golf. I gave him a little honk and waved at him."

We point out the uncommonly easy vibe among the members and Shadows says, "It's actually better today than it's been in a long time.

THE ROAD TO GREATNESS

Ahead of their return to Download, we pick seven historic UK gigs that helped Avenged on their journey to the big time

THE UK DEBUT

WHERE: Glasgow QMU
WHEN: February 7, 2004
WE SAY: The moment our nation was introduced to Avenged firsthand during their tour with Lostprophets and The Bronx. While some scoffed at their AFI-meets-Guns N' Roses image, the songs spoke for themselves. Safe to say, they made an impression.

THE FIRST FESTIVAL

WHERE: Reading Festival
WHEN: August 28, 2004
WE SAY: Packing out the Concrete Jungle tent (remember that?), Avenged's first time on a UK festival stage was an absolute riot, sparking some of the biggest pits of the entire weekend. They stole the day and earned themselves a legion of new followers.

Avenged at Download in 2006, already eyeing up the headline slot

THE GAME-CHANGER

WHERE: Download Festival
WHEN: June 10, 2006
WE SAY: Striding onstage in customised A7X football shirts (that year's Download took place in the middle of a World Cup), they dominated the main stage, staking their claim as a band destined for bigger things. One of metal's most promising bands had come of age.

THE BIG SUPPORT SLOT

WHERE: Twickenham Stadium
WHEN: July 5, 2008
WE SAY: Being picked to support Iron Maiden at the metal legends' biggest ever UK show is no small order, but Avenged went down well with an often-difficult crowd, impressing 80,000 metalheads with a confident, mature showing.

THE REV'S LAST SHOW

WHERE: Sonisphere Festival
WHEN: August 2, 2009
WE SAY: That A7X's headline set on Sonisphere's second stage was one of the most memorable of a weekend that included Metallica speaks volumes. That it was the final show The Rev would ever play lends it an unfortunate – but important – emotional gravitas.

THE DOWNLOAD HEADLINER

WHERE: Download Festival
WHEN: June 13, 2014
WE SAY: Eight years after they first impressed on Download's main stage, Avenged were back as headliners. Packing their mighty *Hail To The King* set, it was a retina-burning, pyro- and prop-filled feast for the senses; Avenged hadn't been passed the torch – they had proudly taken it.

THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

WHERE: London O2 Arena
WHEN: January 21, 2017
WE SAY: Could Avenged recreate the bold ambition of *The Stage* live? You bet your ass they could. Using the Cirque Du Soleil as inspiration, Avenged crafted one of the most impressive stage shows ever seen, with the setlist to match. We can only imagine what Download 2018 will bring...

We should probably consider moving the camera...

This looks like it could get messy. Excellent news

Everyone's got families and we're really respectful to everybody. We take a lot of time off. We're not in a rush to do anything. Stay off the social media, just make music and let the pieces fall where they may. That's how life is at this point."

Looking ahead, this June sees the band's second headlining appearance at Download – no small validation of the role they play in today's scene. "It's hard enough to do it once, so if they ask you back, then I guess it went pretty well. So yeah, I think it's a validation." Shadows also acknowledges that there's still much work to be done. "It's always been a weird thing with Avenged Sevenfold," he explains. "I can go to my golf club and mention Ozzy or Guns N' Roses and they're all going to know who I'm talking about but if you say Avenged Sevenfold they're going to go, 'Eh?' That's why it's important for us to get out there and go as hard as we can to try to win over every one of those people there that night."

"WE'RE INSPIRED. WE'VE THROWN SOME IDEAS AROUND FOR THE NEW ALBUM"

AVENGED ARE LOOKING TO GET TO WORK COME SEPTEMBER TIME

Last year, after careful consideration, the band accepted an offer to support Metallica on parts of their North American tour, which meant a return to the days of daylight shows, shortened setlists and fighting to win over another band's audience. Avenged converted a broad new cross-section of fans and found both friends and mentors in the headliners, particularly drummer Lars Ulrich. "I text with Lars all the time," Shadows says. "He's always saying, 'There is no roadmap, dude.' It's just, 'Let's try this and see what happens.' And these are the biggest guys in the game. Then you look at Ozzy's personality and how he handles his business and how a band like Metallica does, with Lars spearheading things, it's vastly different. Look at Guns N' Roses – that's *completely* different from what Metallica does. What's the common thread? Good fucking songs."

Speaking of good fucking songs, we mention that this very issue of *Hammer* will feature Avenged Sevenfold covers from a battery of a generation of young bands who count Avenged among their influences. For the second time today, Shadows is caught speechless. "Wow... Dude... that's crazy... I'm shocked. We did that for Iron Maiden and I remember how I felt about them, and I still do. I'm just totally shocked. I didn't think we were there, but I appreciate it. That's very cool!"

Talking about young bands opens a conversation about music in general and how other genres still dominate the mainstream while metal largely remains on the outside looking in. "I think the metal audience is the most intelligent audience," he says. "Those are the ones who are going to be the most interested in science, the most interested in tech... when I look at my friends who are great at all of these things, they listen to metal and they listen to progressive rock. But I think that it comes to a point where they can't differentiate between loving a genre and knowing how to grow it. Don't call people 'stupid' and 'dumb' if you're not going to allow bands like us go out and reach those people and bring them into the fold, just like how I got into it. I want to see the genre grow. I want there to be competition. I want there to be bands where we say, 'Oh shit, look what *they* did. That's fucking rad and we need to beat that!'"

Even though *The Stage* is still in its album cycle, new material is on the radar and Shadows describes the band's current status as "inspired".

"We've thrown ideas around," he continues. "Not musically, but just aesthetically as to what we want to do. After September we'll get in the studio and we'll start jamming and I'm sure it will completely change. With the last record, we said something a year before that it was going to be aggressive and this and that and then it completely changed but everyone holds you to that, so there's just no point."

As his bandmates beckon for his long-overdue turn at pool, we ask how life might look if Avenged Sevenfold ended tomorrow. Shadows doesn't hesitate to describe how he'd spend his time.

"I love investing, so I'd get deeper into that. I'd work on my golf game and I'd try to make a videogame. I play videogames all day so I'd try to write a videogame story and go to some of my friends in the industry and try to do that. Anything like that I'd put all my time into it." But would he be happy? "Oh, fuck yeah."

Avenged fans can take heart that the band have no intentions of slowing down. After headlining Florida's Rockville festival, there's US mega-fest, Rock On The Range, in May, followed by a month of European dates including that aforementioned return to Download. They then return to the US in July for the End Of The World tour with Prophets of Rage and Three Days Grace, and it sounds like the songwriting phase of the next album won't be far behind. With their ambitions rivalled only by an exhilarating new creative vision, it's no stretch to say that nearly 20 years into their career, Avenged Sevenfold are only now entering their prime. Shadows agrees.

"For me, rock was always about expression, taking chances and being rebellious," he states. "We have to keep moving forward and if you're going to put us in a box, then you're going to be disappointed." Then, with an unmistakable sense of commitment, he adds: "I don't feel like we've even come close to writing our best record." You can bet every last penny that they won't stop until they do. ✠

THE DELUXE EDITION OF *THE STAGE* IS OUT NOW VIA CAPITOL. AVENGED SEVENFOLD HEADLINE DOWNLOAD ON JUNE 8

"What's green, has four legs and can kill you if it falls out of a tree? A pool table!" "Dude, that's awful."

Just a bunch of good mates and family men who *happen* to be in a huge band...

IT'S CRUNCH TIME

Tallying up the numbers that make up Avenged's incredible career to date

15:39
Time in minutes of Avenged's longest song, *The Stage*'s *Exist*

200,652
Population of Avenged's hometown, Huntingdon Beach, according to a 2016 census

7
Number of studio albums, the most recent being 2016's expansive *The Stage*

2
Number One albums on the Billboard 200: 2010's *Nightmare* and 2013's *Hail To The King*

131,700
Number of fans Avenged played to on their 2017 UK tour, including the 02 Arena twice

6
Covers recorded for the Deluxe Edition of *The Stage*

8,000,000+
Album sales worldwide

1,072
Number of shows A7X have played so far, including 706 in the US

23
Times Avenged or their music have featured been in a videogame, including their own title, *Hail To The King: Deathbat*

130,802,107
Streams of *Hail To The King*, their most-streamed song on Spotify

THE FAMILY MAN

Once Avenged's bratty loudmouth-in-chief, the M. Shadows of 2018 is a responsible parent who wants to see balance in our political discourse. Who'd a thunk it?

WORDS: JOE DALY • PICTURE: TRAVIS SHINN

Just like any other parent, M. Shadows deals with the pressures of raising his two boys in an age when information flows like a firehose and social media dominates how people now interact. Unlike most parents, however, Shadows faces the daunting reality that his colourful and occasionally sordid past has been well chronicled online, and is easily discovered by any kid with a bit of curiosity and access to Google. Taking his standard approach to life, the singer meets it all head on.

"I'm always really open with my boys," he says, "and when anything's going on, I try to talk to them about it. They're probably a little young for some of the stuff but at the end of the day they're going to find that stuff out about their dad, whether they find out when they're 40 or they find out when they're younger. They're going to be online – do you let them open an Instagram account? Do you let them sign up for Facebook? You've got to be engaged because that's all you can do."

Still, as children of a bona fide rockstar, certain allowances must be made. "They're little rockers," he says with a flash of pride, "and they do the little devil horns and they sing *'Fucking nightmare!'* at their school and I get called on it. But I like it. I think it's great. I'm not one to punish people over language. You can do it at home but try not to do it at school. Maybe that's not the best fatherly advice… ha ha!"

When you speak with Shadows – he introduces himself as Matt – it's almost disarming how utterly normal he is. With close-cropped hair, dark jeans and a black t-shirt, he'd be easy to miss if he weren't 6"1'. But this is Huntington Beach, his hometown, and here he feels like any other local. "It's such a low-key place. We don't feel famous at all. I definitely don't. When we're on tour I'll go to random gyms wherever we go and I usually don't get recognised much. I'm sure it would be harder if you were at the gym and you were Kanye West. Everyone would be sitting there taking pictures. You wouldn't get anything done! I don't have to do that. I can go out whenever I want."

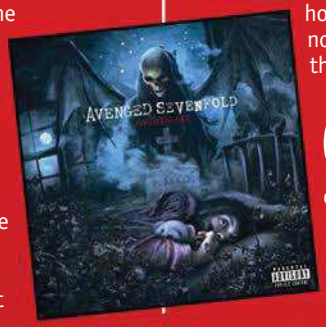
MICK HUTSON/GETTY

To the fans, he's M. Shadows the rock star. Back home, he's just 'Dad'

The singer has come a hell of a long way since the band's early days, when the guys earned a reputation as hard chargers, often making the sort of outlandish proclamations one should expect from a bunch of 20-somethings tasting real fame for the first time. Looking back now, he says, "People hold our feet to the fire for things that 19-year-old kids said in a certain scene in a certain context. You're not going to get away from that, no matter what. There are people who think they have us pinned down and they'll never change their opinion of what Avenged Sevenfold is because of something we said when we were 20. You could try to change that narrative but they won't listen anyways and it makes you look like you're trying too hard to change the narrative and it doesn't matter anyway because it's out of context. There's nothing you can do about it. That's just how our country is, especially right now anyways. People believe what they want to believe."

"MY KIDS GET TOLD OFF FOR SINGING *NIGHTMARE* AT SCHOOL"

SHADOWS DOESN'T PUNISH OVER PROFANITIES



One lesson he's learned the hard way is that there's simply no upside to going on the record about politics. Conservative-leaning comments that he made in the past drew feverish attention from the media and away from the music. Today he elects not to discuss politics in interviews, although he offers, "I do think that for both sides, when you get too far out on the fringes, they use each other as bait to talk about how dumb each side is, when really both sides have a lot of common ground. But it gets too convoluted with the internet and with the Russian thing and with the gun thing. And we've got a President who literally says he's going to fight a [former] Vice President. What are we, in high school? And people are cool with that! And that's crazy to me, that that's the standard we've created at this point. So I'm incredibly disappointed with the climate but on all of those nuanced situations, I choose not to comment. But if anyone was to ask me about it off the record, I'd have any conversation about any of that stuff because I love it. But I will say that I believe in facts – *real* facts – and science, and that's kind of how I guide my views of the world."

We've already had a rather long chat about the band, *The Stage* and the future of Avenged Sevenfold, so we ask about life away from the rigours of the job. "The other guys are into surfing," he says. "My hobbies are videogames, golf and working out. Right now I'm playing *PUBG – PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* – and I play a lot of *Call Of Duty*. I have a LAN set-up in my studio so I can switch over from music to videogames. Other than that, I golf. I'm a member at a few golf clubs and that's what I love to do." In fact, the singer is no slouch on the course. With a handicap of 12, you'd be a fool to play him for money.

With a hectic touring schedule ahead and the songwriting process for their next album forming on the horizon, Shadows is happy to spend time as much time as he can these days with his family. And while Avenged Sevenfold remains his job and his passion, his motivations have evolved. "Being a dad has changed me in the sense that all I want to do is hang out with my kids and my wife and just be there for them. It's crazy that they're going to be their own little people and I don't want them to grow up. They're so cute right now and so awesome and I just want to try to be the best dad possible because I don't believe that anything else comes even close to being as important as that." ✠

THE MEDIATOR

He may be known as one of the 21st century's premier guitar heroes, but within Avenged, Synyster Gates is also the guy keeping the team together

WORDS: JOE DALY • PICTURE: TRAVIS SHINN

There are two kinds of drinkers in this world: those who can't handle their hangovers and the ones who can. Synyster Gates falls squarely in the latter camp. Despite paying the head-splitting toll for a big night out in his hometown of Huntington Beach, we find the Avenged Sevenfold guitarist both affable and jocular. He assures us that while they've dialled back a good bit of the ol' rock'n'roll excess, he and the lads are still well up for the odd night on the town. "We are trying to retire some of those nights," he says, "but we're still unopposed to them, as douchey as they may be. We still have hangovers, but more of the wine- and martini–induced kind. We're doing our best to keep it classy. Ha ha ha!"

You get a lot of that sort of casual, self–effacing humour when speaking with Synyster. Chill as you like, he tends to listen intently to what you're saying and he'll ask a lot of questions back at you. It's no wonder that he's the band's resident mediator. "I make sure that all the relationships are intact. I feel like I listen to everybody in the band and if there are small issues – and we're very, very lucky because we don't really have any gnarly issues – I try to work things out so that everybody's as happy as possible. I've never admitted that before and I think I'm going to regret having done so. But after a few years of it, I guess that's what I do. I'm the gel."

Like Johnny, Synyster enjoys patrolling the glassy waves up and down the Huntington Beach coast. Something he's done his whole life, surfing has evolved from a thrillseeking adventure to something far deeper. "I'm working on slowing down and not trying to be the best at everything," he says. "In my mid-20s I started travelling for surf with my wife and I experienced a lot of different waves – intense waves, reef breaks and all this stuff. I felt like I was in a unique position to get really fucking good at surfing, but then I realised a few years later that I didn't have the talent for it and it fucking bummed me out! These days I just try to get out and enjoy the fact that I'm in the water with my friends or my wife or my fathers and just do my best to get a little exercise, because I drink too much on the road. Now I try to keep it way less competitive."

"I'M THE GEL. I KEEP THESE RELATIONSHIPS INTACT"

SYNYSTER KEEPS THE PEACE IN AVENGED

You read that correctly – "fathers", as in plural. "Yup, both of my fathers," he explains. "I've known my stepdad Bruce for my entire life. I love them both to death." Now that he's a dad himself, his career has taken on a new sense of purpose and vitality. "Being a dad makes you want to write *the* greatest song in the world, not for you but just for your legacy, to provide more. If you write the greatest song in the world, that's a gift you're giving to your son. Fatherhood can be just fucking madness! Total absolute chaos, but it's the most beautiful thing you could be a part of."

When he's not on tour or home with his wife and son, Synyster runs an online guitar school – the Synyster Gates School – with his dad, Brian. "We're really proud of the uniqueness of it," he says. "We have a bunch of video content from A to Z, but number one, it's free. There's no upselling – you have access to everything. And second, you also have access to thousands of other students and all of their insights. So you post a question and then you literally have dozens of kids answering with their way of doing things. We also have a no-tolerance policy for bullying. Violators are kicked out immediately – no second chances. We encourage debate and criticism, but one of the gold stars of this fucking community is that I haven't had to kick one person off. It's really community-friendly and we're really proud of it."

That he uses his fame to freely share his gifts only underscores the unique connection the band share with their fans. Regardless of the money, fame and accolades that they've earned, none of the guys buy into their own celebrity. "I know we draw tens of thousands of kids a night and all of that kind of stuff but you don't feel that," he explains. "There are no paparazzi at my house. I live right by the high school and funny enough, the only fans that have ever come to my house are fans from way out of town, like across the pond, and only a handful of times. A couple of Swedish girls came by and a guy from Utah once, and it was really sweet. He had twin daughters and loved not just the music but he loved the band dynamic of us all being friends and the fact that my singer and I are married to twins who we grew up with. We're best friends and we're lucky to be respected and related to by our fans."

Gratitude permeates so much of what he says, which is unquestionably why so many are drawn to him; he can be both the coolest guy in the room and the guy most likely to join you at the bar for a long, heart-to-heart chat about life. He takes nothing for granted. "I know it sounds clichéd," he says, "but I don't go a day without really appreciating it all and sometimes it's because it's right there in front of my face. My sister-in-law will come over with her kids – Matt's kids, my nephews – and I get an amazing sense of luck and bewilderment. Like, 'Why me?' It's like a fairytale. If this band ended tomorrow, I'd just start a different band with the same dudes." ✠

GETTY

M. Shadows and Synyster: brothers-in-law in arms

DAD INTENTIONS

'Papa Gates' to the fans, Syn's dad is an A7X legend in his own right. We talk to Brian Haner Sr. about his son, his own career as a musician and jamming with the lads

WORDS: JOE DALY

YOUR SON IS KNOWN FOR HIS GUITAR SKILLS, BUT YOU'RE QUITE THE ACCOMPLISHED GUITARIST YOURSELF!
"Yeah, I've been a session musician for about 40 years. I did a lot of session work back in the 70s with R&B bands like Rose Royce. I played on the song *Car Wash*, which is still kind of a famous song. I also played guitar on the *Animal House* soundtrack, on all of the stuff with Otis Day And The Knights."

WITH ALL OF YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY, WHAT KIND OF ADVICE DID YOU SHARE WITH YOUR SON WHEN HE TOLD YOU HE WANTED TO BECOME A FULL-TIME MUSICIAN?
"I told him that he needed to find a way to make a living, but that if you're in it to make money, then you're in the wrong business. I was always honest with him and I told him that if he worked hard, he'd get a shot at it, but even if you have a lot of talent, it's not a given that you'll make it."

WHAT WAS SYN LIKE AS A LITTLE KID?
"He was a precocious little bastard! Wild as hell. He was a sweet kid, but he was *wild*. He had a mind of his own and he was going to do what he was going to do. He wanted to learn guitar, so I got him a little guitar and he demanded that I teach him *Black Dog* by Led Zeppelin."

NOT A BAD FIRST CHOICE...
"I said, 'Even as far as Zeppelin goes, that's a really difficult song,' but he said, 'I don't care.' I said, 'Well, let's start with an E chord,' and he said, 'Let's start with *Black Dog*.' Ha ha ha! He was like eight years old at the time, so I said, 'OK, here's how you play *Black Dog*.' I just went after it and I could hear him in the other room doing the lick over and over and over until he finally got it."

Syn with Papa Gates: a chip off the old block

"SYN WAS A PRECOCIOUS LITTLE BASTARD"

BUT THERE'S NO DENYING IT SERVED HIM WELL...

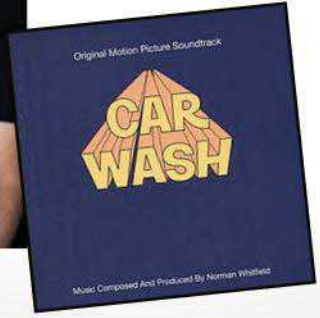
WHEN DID YOU FIRST NOTICE HE'D DEVELOPED HIS OWN STYLE?
"Way later than you'd imagine. When he was a teenager, he didn't practise much. In high school he played a little, but at that point he just didn't seem like he was that into it."

WHAT CHANGED?
"He started hanging with Jimmy – The Rev – and that's when it all changed. Jimmy was monstrous at 12 years old. He could have played with just about anybody. He was that kind of a phenom and he started demanding more of Brian. He said, 'Look, if you're going to play with me, you're gonna have to get your shit together.' So Brian did. Obviously as a dad, I'm very proud, and as a professional, it's just mind-boggling how proficient he is. There's just a handful of guys on the planet that can do what he does. He's got technique, he's got style and he's flawless – it's always perfect."

WHAT'S YOUR PROUDEST MOMENT AS HIS DAD?
"I'm obviously proud that he's on the front covers of magazines and that he's lauded as one of the greatest guitar players ever. But I know, as we all do, a lot of great guitar players that are assholes. If he were just a great guitar player and a jerk, then I wouldn't be very proud of him. But he's just the coolest guy. He's just normal and fun and he's good to the fans, too."

HOW SO?
"Like this Internet guitar school we started – the Synyster Gates School. It's free even though he could easily be charging $9.99 a month or $19.99 a month and pocket some serious money. But when he started it, he was like, 'No, this is my legacy. I want to share what I know. I want to give something back and show these kids that they can do this, too.' Those are the kinds of things that speak to his character, and as a dad, that's what makes me the most proud." ✠

Syn and his dad started an online guitar school to create "a legion of fucking shredders"



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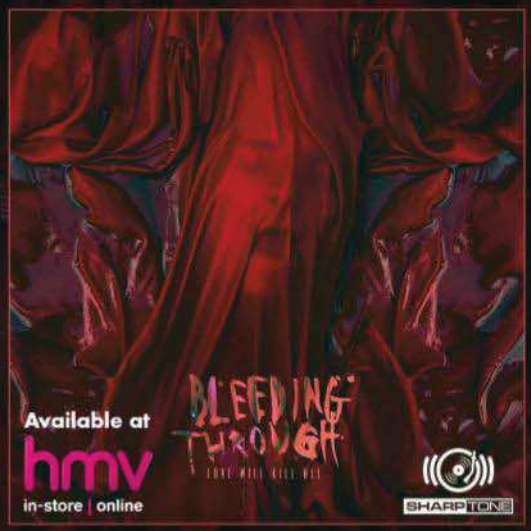

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THE BUSINESSMAN

As well as laying down the riffs that pin Avenged together, Zacky Vengeance has been the man with the plan to keep their business affairs on track

WORDS: JOE DALY • PICTURE: TRAVIS SHINN

Whether it's bad business deals, shady advisors or the seductive dangers of rock'n'roll decadence, there's no guarantee that once a band hit it big, it's all $1,000 lunches and guitar-shaped swimming pools forever and ever. The reality is that no band or artist can afford to insulate themselves from the business side of the music industry, and for Avenged Sevenfold, it's guitarist Zachary Baker – AKA Zacky Vengeance – keeping a watchful eye on the band's affairs.

"I think I carry a strong vision of what keeps Avenged Sevenfold's integrity throughout everything we do," he says. "I try to handle the business aspects to make sure that nobody's trying to screw us over and to make sure that we're making smart decisions." A cursory survey of the band's wildly abundant successes establish that he's doing his job pretty damned well.

This morning, we find Zacky finishing up "dad-life stuff", as he tells us. When he's not touring, Zacky's all about family life, spending his downtime in his Huntington Beach home with his wife and two-year-old son. Like the other guys, he was raised there and he wouldn't live anywhere else. "Huntington Beach encompasses everything great about Southern California. If you look to your left you have the ocean; over to the right, there's snow-covered mountains. You've got surfers, skateboarders, punk rockers, gangbangers and stand-up characters working hard for the community. You've also got lots of homeless people who have fallen on bad times. It's a mesh of all walks of life that come together harmoniously. It's an incredible place to live. I've never seen so much pride for a city that the people of Huntington have for Huntington Beach."

Thoughtful and relentlessly sincere, it's easy to see why Zacky fits in so well with the rest of the guys; he carries himself with sincerity, gratitude and a healthy dose of humility and it's clear that, over time, he's learned how to balance professional success with the things that matter the most to him. "Family's number one above everything," he says. "I've been blessed with the most incredible, tight-knit family. They've supported everything I've done and they still do. They love coming to concerts, they love my bandmates, they love my friends and now that I have a son of my own, he's something to look forward to every day. And I really value the times that I spend with my dad. Now that he's gotten older, we still do cool things together. Every Saturday and Sunday morning, we're out riding motorcycles together and shooting the shit."

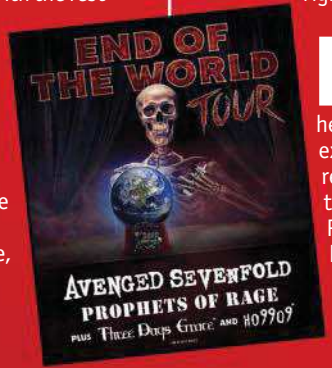
WILL IRELAND/GETTY

Arena stars: Zacky and Synyster at London's O2 last year

Zacky also oversees the band's artwork and t-shirt designs, and he conceived the name of their upcoming tour with Prophets Of Rage and Three Days Grace – The End Of The World Tour. "We're at kind of a dangerous point in history," he explains, "and I felt that The End Of The World Tour was kind of paying homage to the end of this touring cycle for Avenged Sevenfold. But also it's a play on words for the fact that we have an unstable President and a lot of unstable world leaders. You never know who has their finger on the button. This is the most polarised I've seen the world in my lifetime, so it just felt like the right name."

"I MAKE SURE NOBODY'S SCREWING US OVER"

ZACKY HAS HIS HEAD SCREWED ON WHEN IT COMES TO BUSINESS



Rare is the musician who listens exclusively to the same type of music that he or she plays, and Zacky is no exception. "I think there's some really cool things happening in the rap and pop worlds. I think Post Malone's pretty cool because he's an unlikely candidate for a hip hop superstar and I just think that's fucking badass. I think it's truly punk rock when you can do something that's nearly impossible and do it better than other people. But I *love* Gojira. I think that Mastodon and Gojira are fucking awesome. Even if they were selling out arenas, I would still think they're underrated. To hear bands make such awesome songs is really, really refreshing. Other than that, I'm always going back to the classics. I'm always listening to Led Zeppelin, I'm always listening to Black Sabbath. I love that stuff."

Throughout our conversation, Zacky emanates a keen sense of self-awareness – a quality that can only develop through endless cycles of taking risks, learning hard lessons and pushing forward. You can't survive 20 years of rock'n'roll and come out the other side as the same person who entered. When Zacky reflects back on the journey so far, it's the fans who put it all in perspective. "One of the greatest gifts of growing older is how much I appreciate our fans. It's not about the money, it's not about any of that. It's awesome that I'm able to take care of my family and bring them with me on tour, but really it's about the stories from fans. The fact that people have our names tattooed on them. I've looked in kids' eyes as they've told me that our band has saved their life. Fans have made friends, they've met each other and created families because of us. People have bonds with their parents over us. And you don't appreciate that until you get older and have a family of your own. When I was younger there would be times when I'd get bummed out when fans would come talk to us while we were having lunch or something, but now I'm just so fucking happy that we have fans."

We've asked each of the guys what they'd do if the band suddenly ended tomorrow and it's telling that before looking ahead, Zacky takes a long look back. "If Avenged Sevenfold ended tomorrow," he says with a good measure of passion, "I'd fucking count my blessings that I was able to do it for so long. I'd be so fucking happy that our band – our shitty fucking hardcore band that we started in a garage – were able to travel the world a fucking hundred times over and play for millions of fans and become friends with Metallica. If it were to all end tomorrow, for whatever reason, I'd definitely be sad but I'd be so fucking thankful that it happened."

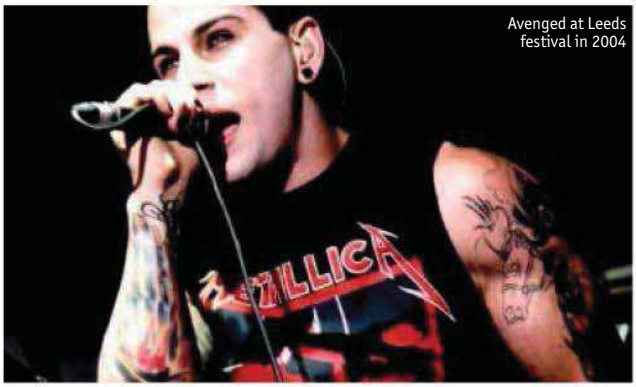
MOTOR
HARLEY-DAVIDSON
CYCLES
MARK

MEET THE MANAGER

The man behind the scenes of Avenged's rise to fame, Larry Jacobson has seen his boys grow from hellraising upstarts into one of metal's biggest bands

WORDS: MATT MILLS

WHAT DID YOU DO BEFORE MANAGING AVENGED?
"I had run Giant Records for 10 years. We sold it to AOL Time Warner in 2001, I went to Capitol and I was the number-two executive there. And then I left to start my own company and I stumbled across this band that was living with their parents at the time..."


Avenged at Leeds festival in 2004

HOW DID YOU FIRST HEAR OF THEM?
"Not long after I left Capitol, I called up our money managers to say, 'Look, I've just started my own business,' and the guy that I usually dealt with was out that day, so his partner picked up the phone. He said, 'My brother owns an independent label [Hopeless Records]. Would you mind meeting up with him and giving him some tips?' A few weeks later I met him and he handed me a stack of CDs. Later that night, I started throwing them on in my study, and this one-minute-26-second song came on the stereo. I flipped out and thought, 'This could be the biggest band in the world.' That song was *To End The Rapture*."

"WE'RE STILL PAYING FOR DESTROYED HOTEL ROOMS TO THIS DAY"
BUT LARRY ISN'T BLAMING ANYONE IN PARTICULAR <COUGH> JOHNNY <COUGH>

WHAT WAS GOING THROUGH YOUR HEAD AS YOU WERE LISTENING?
"I loved Matt's voice. I loved the screaming. To me, nobody had screamed that way. I loved all the harmonies. I loved all the punk rock influences that you didn't really hear other people doing. They were also writing all of these long, meandering songs. I loved that the songs had different parts to them that all worked. This is why I love managing this band and getting new music from them: seven minutes into a song, they'll still surprise you."

HOW DID YOU FIRST MEET AVENGED IN PERSON?
"I drove down to Orange County. They weren't playing, but there was a show at Chain Reaction. M. Shadows was there – I think he was 20 years old. I introduced myself and he didn't want to know me at all, but I persuaded him to let me take him and the band out to dinner, so we went to the Rainbow in Hollywood – the classic hard rock Mecca. We sit down, the band turns to me and says, 'We don't want a manager. We don't want some guy telling us what to do!' By the end of the night I was managing them."

Larry was determined to manage A7X, whether they wanted a manager or not!

AVENGED USED TO GET INTO A LOT OF TROUBLE. HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO NAVIGATE THAT?
"Some of it was brought upon them by the media, and some of it was the band's doing. I'd tell them, 'You know, that's not gonna help you move the ball down the field.' I believed then and now that they're one of the most important bands in history, and that stuff was all just gonna get in the way of that and could cheapen them. First of all, it'd cheapen them because it's not the real story: the real story is their artistry, not the shenanigans. Second of all, it'd cheapen them because they're not the first band to do that! With Mötley Crüe and Guns N' Roses, rock bands being crazy is familiar. So for them to have the reputation of being the next Mötley Crüe instead of being a truly great rock band in their own right, how does that help? But there's also a positive to it: as a person who loves hard rock, part of what it thrives on is danger and mystique. That's something that you don't really see today. But we're still paying for destroyed hotel rooms to this day. Thank you, Johnny Christ!"

WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE AVENGED GO NEXT?
"I want them on the cusp of new music delivery. The world has changed: we've become a streaming society when it comes to how we consume music and we've become a television-on-demand culture when it comes to how we watch TV. I think that TV has surpassed movies in terms of freedom as an artform and, creatively, I would like to see this band experiment and take chances in that direction as well." ✠

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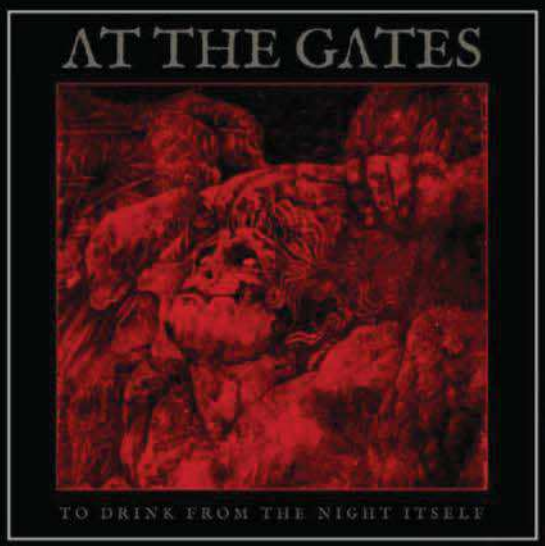

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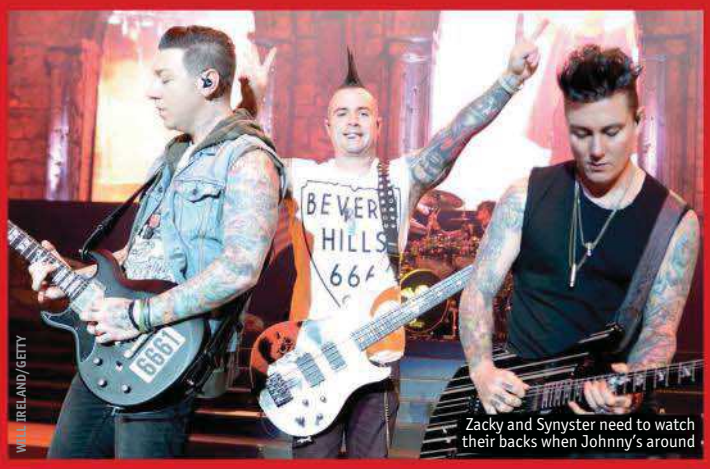
THE PRANKSTER

Johnny Christ hasn't just become a vital part of the Avenged writing machine – he's also the band's resident goofball

WORDS: JOE DALY • PICTURE: TRAVIS SHINN

During a stop on A7X's recent European tour, observant fans might have noticed some unanticipated chaos onstage, when Synyster's in-ear mic stopped working. Or so it seemed when the guitarist suddenly noticed that his vocals were coming across in piercing, high-pitched squeaks. His chest-stopping alarm quickly faded, however, when he looked across the stage and saw Johnny Christ laughing uncontrollably. "I had the sound guy put his vocal mic in his ears with a pitch shifter," Johnny explains, "so it made him sound like a chipmunk to himself." Still laughing as he describes the scene, Johnny says, "He was the only one who heard it. Well, the band were the only ones who heard it – it wasn't going out to the audience – but no one else knew what was going on so he just looked like a weirdo, laughing, then getting mad… It really couldn't have been a better reaction."



WILL IRELAND/GETTY

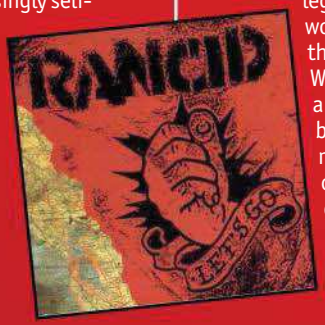
Zacky and Synyster need to watch their backs when Johnny's around

It was all in a day's work for Avenged's bassist and resident prankster – a role that Johnny has happily occupied for years. "If we were a family, I'd be the little brother. I grew up as their little brother, before we were even in a band. Brian [Syn] and Jimmy [The Rev] used to come over to my house when we were little because they were good friends with one of my older brothers. Naturally, one of my brothers would be picking on me and they'd chime in. That old thing. I'm the younger brother and I like to cause shit. I admit it. Ha ha ha! I've gotta! I've gotta get my digs in. I like to get under people's skin sometimes, just to get a rise out of them. And I've been known to pull some pranks…"

"I'M THE YOUNGER BROTHER. I LIKE TO CAUSE SHIT"

JOHNNY LIVES TO PLAY PRANKS ON HIS BANDMATES

With darkened shades, the hint of a scowl and often sporting a mohawk, Johnny cuts a bit of an edgy figure, but in person he's friendly as hell, extremely polite and amusingly self-effacing. Like the rest of the guys, he was born and raised in Huntington Beach, where he now lives with his wife and their one-year old son – not too far from his co-workers. "We're a stone's throw away from the rest of the guys," he explains. "I walk to downtown Huntington Beach with Brian all the time. We meet up at Matt's house, which is another 10-minute walk. We're all a 10-minute walk from each other here in Huntington. You can't really make this stuff up."



As the band have expanded their vision to draw in more diverse influences, the guys have taken on new roles with each successive release. *Hail To The King* saw Johnny assume a more active role in the songwriting. "*Hail*… was the one where I started to become more a part of it. On the last record I was running Pro Tools the whole time while we were at Brian's house, producing in a small way. Just guiding the songs and trying a few things."

Today, any of the lads will tell you that one of the keys to longevity is offsetting an aggressive touring regimen with ample time off to decompress and recharge. Off the road, when he's not in family mode, you're likely to find Johnny riding some of Huntington Beach's legendary waves – although he would be the first guy to tell you that he's a long way from the World Surf League. "I'm actually a horrible surfer but I enjoy it because it gets me up in the morning and out with a couple of buddies," he says. "It feels good to get in the ocean and that salt water. That's where I thrive and feel good. You actually get energised from it, which is something else I like about it."

With a broad sonic palette that ranges from Rancid (he's a massive fan) to jazz and classical (because it's good for his son, he's heard), he's eager to begin the next songwriting phase and to see what sounds emerge from the process. "We all have very eclectic tastes and we like to pull from great music that came before us and from great songwriters and other sources of inspiration. I think we have always tried to challenge ourselves on every record. That's what makes it fun."

If the band were to suddenly end tomorrow, we wonder what he'd do with himself. "Oh, fuck, man. Good question. Music has been in my blood since I was very young. My dad's a metalhead and my mom's into pop and I love aspects of both. My earliest memories were going on roadtrips and really loving the music that was being played in my dad's Astro van. So I couldn't see going into too many other different avenues. It's pretty much just music for me." Maybe take a crack at professional surfing? "Ha ha! I don't think that's in my future," he says. "I could chase the Pro Surfing Tour for a while and try to befriend some of the guys but I don't think I'd be in any kind of competition."

When reading celebrity profiles, writers often gush over how down to earth the subject seems, in a way that can feel contrived or inauthentic. But with Johnny, that's exactly the case. He's travelled the world, entertained millions of fans and counts the guys in Metallica among his buddies. Yet through surreal levels of success, the bassist, dad and friend maintains a balanced perspective about his fame. "I don't really think about it too much. I live in the same place I've been since I was four. I've been around the same family and the same friends that I had in elementary school, and we still hang out every chance that we get. But sometimes you do have to pinch yourself and live in the moment and understand that you've been part of something that's pretty special. At the same time, I try not to dwell on that and to stay as humble as I can with my friends and family. And it's easy for me because being the little brother, I'm easily humbled. Ha ha ha!" ✠

MEMBERS ONLY

"JIMMY WAS BORN TO PLAY MUSIC"

On December 28, 2009, Avenged's world was turned upside down. Their drummer and friend, Jimmy 'The Rev' Sullivan, died following an accidental overdose of prescription drugs and alcohol. In a special interview, we talk to Jimmy's parents, Joe and Barbara, about The Rev's life, career and legacy

WORDS: JOE DALY

LONG BEFORE HE WAS THE REV, JIMMY WAS YOUR SON. WHAT WAS HE LIKE GROWING UP?
Barbara: "He was funny! He was the funniest kid you ever were around, but he also drove you crazy because some of the things that he thought were funny weren't, like bugging his sisters. But he was just a lot of fun."
Joe: "He was exuberant. You'd say, 'Jimmy, that's not funny!' And he'd always say, 'But it's funny to me!'"

WHEN DID HE FIRST TAKE AN INTEREST IN MUSIC?
Barbara: "When he was born! By the time he was two years old, he was drumming on everything. If he had silverware, he drummed. If he was in the bathtub, he'd grab the bubble bath bottle or the shampoo bottles and drum on the side of the tub.
As a little kid, he also loved records. He had a little Fisher-Price record player that played little 78s or 45s."

WHAT DID HE PLAY ON IT?
Joe: "Sammy Hagar, *I Can't Drive 55*, Tom Petty…"
Barbara: "He played music constantly. He'd stand there with a little fake guitar, singing to the music on his little Fisher-Price record player. It was hysterical."

WHEN DID YOU FIRST NOTICE HE ACTUALLY HAD A TALENT FOR THIS THING?
Barbara: "Right away. When he was five, I signed him up for drum lessons with a local drummer, and he wouldn't give him lessons after the first couple of times because Jimmy played with abandon and the teacher said, 'I'm going through too many drum heads and Jimmy's going to ruin my rims.'"

HOW DID YOU REACT WHEN HE DECIDED TO BECOME A FULL-TIME MUSICIAN?
Joe: "It couldn't have been any other way. We were hoping along with him that he'd find a way to be able to play. A full-time musician is what he was born for, so it wasn't a surprise."

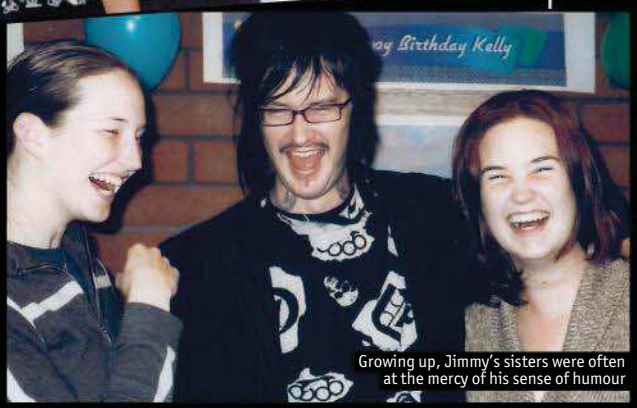
HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN AVENGED STARTED TO GET FAMOUS?
Barbara: "I thought it was fantastic. They had a lot of talent and I think they deserved it. To see him succeed was marvellous."
Joe: "It was very exciting for us. They called us from a bus once when they were heading out of town because it was the first time that KROQ played *Bat Country*. 'Our song's on the radio!'"
Barbara: "They were so excited. 'Turn on the radio! Turn it on!'"

DO YOU RECALL YOUR LAST CONVERSATION WITH JIMMY?
Barbara: "I really do. In his last few days, he said that he needed a new goal. He had eye surgery so he could see without glasses. He bought a car, he bought a condo on the beach, the band got their gold record and was a success and he goes, 'I need a new goal, mom.'"
Joe: "The thing I remember was a text: 'Pray for Zimmer.' He and his girlfriend had this rabbit and the rabbit was sick or had an eye infection or something and I get this text from my son: 'Pray for Zimmer.' I knew I had to keep that one."

WHAT WERE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE BAND'S DECISION TO CONTINUE WITHOUT HIM? IT MUST HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT…
Barbara: "We encouraged them. Jimmy had written a lot of that last album and they had built up a band. I didn't want to see it go away and I really wanted that last album out there. We talked to Matt and we said, 'Even if this is the last album you do, you've got to put it out.'"
Joe: "Every show they still play songs from *Nightmare* and they pipe Jimmy's voice in just a little bit, just keeping him there. We're really glad they kept going."

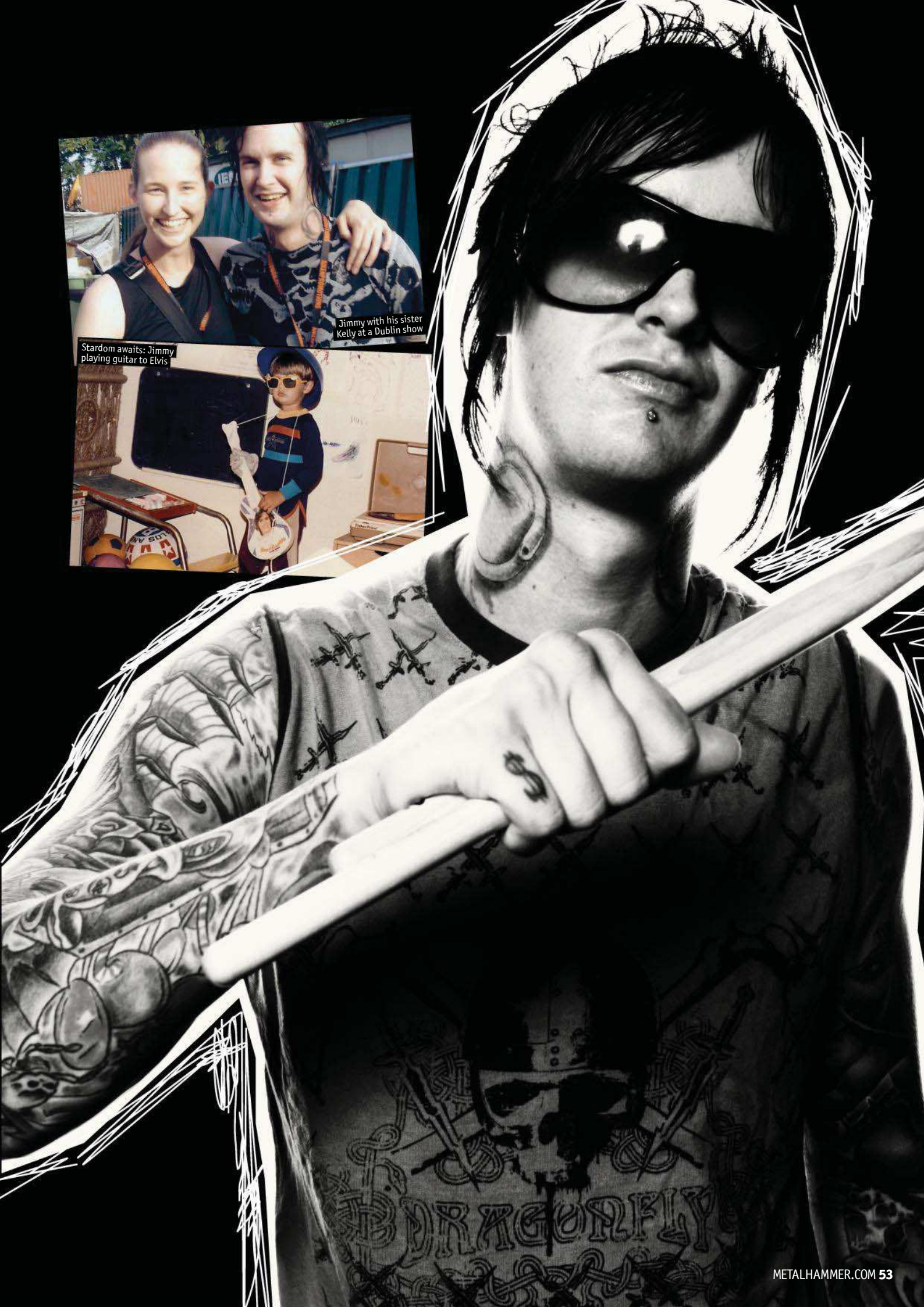
WHAT'S YOUR MOST ENDURING MEMORY OF JIMMY?
Barbara: "I don't think I will ever forget his smile. That big, impish grin. The very last Christmas that we had with him, just a few days before he passed, I asked him, 'What do you want for Christmas?' He said, 'I want a decorative chicken.' A decorative chicken? Who knows?! Ha ha ha! As each of the boys got married, I gave them decorative chickens in memory of Jimmy."
Joe: "For me, it's the big hugs. Jimmy had these big wide arms and he would come in and grab you by the shoulders and say, 'C'mere…' and hug you. What it meant to me was that he was comfortable with himself. He wasn't frustrated anymore. He got to play, he got to be good to others and take care of people. Jimmy would hug everybody and to me, that's what I remember." ✠

The Sullivan family



Growing up, Jimmy's sisters were often at the mercy of his sense of humour

ARCHIVE IMAGES: THE SULLIVAN FAMILY


Jimmy with his sister Kelly at a Dublin show
Stardom awaits: Jimmy playing guitar to Elvis
DRAGONFLY

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THE ELDER STATESMAN

Brooks Wackerman may have a few years on his bandmates, but he's become every bit an equal part of the family

WORDS: JOE DALY • PICTURE: TRAVIS SHINN

When former Bad Religion drummer Brooks Wackerman officially joined the Avenged Sevenfold family in 2015, he swapped more than just employers; he swapped his role as the young kid in one band for that of the elder statesman in his new one. "It's funny, because with every other band that I've played in leading up to Avenged Sevenfold, I've always been the baby in the band," Brooks explains. "I was in Suicidal Tendencies and Bad Religion and Tenacious D and, literally, I was eight-to-10 years younger than everyone. So the tables have turned! Ha ha ha!"

Born and raised in nearby Seal Beach, Brooks moved to Long Beach in his 20s, where he now lives with his wife and identical twin boys. "Family's obviously the main priority in my life. My wife and I have pretty big families on both sides so holidays are always chaotic and joyful. Plus, with all the touring that we do without family, FaceTime sessions with the family and checking in every day are extremely paramount in my life."

In Brooks, the band have found an absurdly talented timekeeper who fits in well with the rest of the band, both artistically and socially. "At this point I feel like I've found my voice and role in the band, creatively," he explains. "We're the same in a lot of respects and also very different, and I think that's what attracts this amalgamation of fans to what makes Avenged Sevenfold."

Softly spoken and polite, with a dry sense of humour, it's easy to see why Brooks fits in so well with his bandmates. He's a true lifer – wholly committed to playing music wherever and whenever he can, constantly seeking out new styles and challenges. And having joined other accomplished bands in the past, Brooks understood where he needed to focus when with Avenged. "I was familiar with joining an established band. The only strategy was walking in with humility and just being a student of how their process works, how they write songs and what they do live that's different from the records. I'm their fourth drummer, so this wasn't their first rodeo, either."

While he'd joined well-known acts in the past, none had amassed the feverish global following of Avenged Sevenfold, which posed a bit of a shock. "I knew Avenged were well-established," Brooks says, "and that they've done really well but it wasn't until we started travelling into some of these markets, like Indonesia – we're supposedly huge there – that I realised how consistent the level of popularity was. I was blown away by how rabid their fanbase was. I can say that hands-down, I've never been in a band where the fans are as tenacious as they are with Avenged Sevenfold. I haven't seen anything quite like this before."

"I THINK ABOUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THIS DIDN'T WORK"

IF BROOKS AND AVENGED EVER PART WAYS, BILLS STILL NEED TO BE PAID

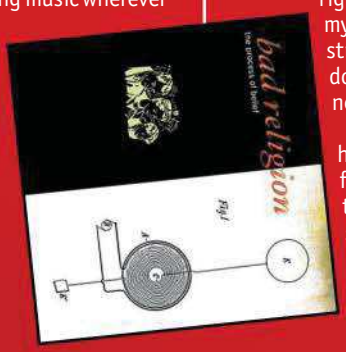
If there's one major difference separating Brooks from the rest of the band, it's his lifestyle – something that becomes apparent in the bar, when the lads raise a sloppy toast of shots and Brooks clinks in with a Starbucks cup. "Yeah, I don't drink," he says with a laugh. "It's as simple as I hate the taste of alcohol. I've tried sipping on various amounts of alcohol and I've really given it the ol' college try but I'd be inauthentic if I acted like that guy that I'm not. I don't know if 'straight edge' is the right term because I do have sex with my wife, but I guess I am kind of straight edge in the sense that I don't do drugs or drink and I've never smoked."

The fact that the rest of the guys have pulled back their drinking is fortuitous, then, as Brooks notes that this might not have been such a good fit a few years ago. "I've heard the *City Of Evil* days were maybe equivalent to what Mötley Crüe were in the *Theater Of Pain* days," he says with a laugh. "But that only lasts for so long. When we go out for a steak dinner, they're ordering drinks that I never even knew existed. They are still connoisseurs of libations. But I think we both kind of get a chuckle from the fact that I don't know anything about alcohol and they're just these fucking professionals that know how to drink and that have been drinking for decades. It's an interesting mix and I wouldn't want it any other way."

When he's not on the road or spending time with his family, Brooks has cultivated an absorbing new hobby as a writer. "I started writing short film scripts about five years ago," he says, "and I write these dramatic comedy sketches that I really enjoy. In the next year I plan on filming some of these and acting in them. It's a lot of hard work but by the end of the day I'm still enjoying it so to me it's worth it. Like being a musician, it's a lifetime commitment to education and to being open-minded to all different styles."

While Brooks is settled in the Avenged fold and there are no signs of that changing, their turnover of sticksmen since The Rev passed leads us to ask what he'd do if things didn't work out with the guys down the road. "I think about that periodically," he says, "because I have a mortgage and a phone bill, so I'd probably just keep the door open for what other musicians or bands were interested in having me in their gang. Or maybe start a new band or produce a band. Something in the arts. I can't see myself doing anything except being an artist."

But make no mistake, Brooks has committed to Avenged Sevenfold for the long haul. "As a drummer, I really couldn't ask for a better gig, because they allow me to be myself," he says. "It's an awesome band to be in as far as how family-oriented it is and with everyone being a dad. Now I can fly my wife and kids out anytime and everyone's just very supportive of one another. As far as being musically and personally where I want, I feel both lucky and grateful." ✠



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THE PEOPLE VS OZZY

As he prepares to hit Download on his farewell tour, we gathered some of metal's biggest names to grill the Prince Of Fucking Darkness...

WORDS: LUKE MORTON • PICTURES: JOHN McMURTRIE

Ozzy Osbourne is beginning his long bow out from touring, including a headline spot at Download festival this June. But what do you ask the man who has seen and done it all? We collected questions from some of the biggest musicians in our world. And as you'd expect with the Double O, he's not one to shy away from giving an answer... even if it's not necessarily to the question you asked.

DO YOU STILL HAVE THE SAME PASSION FOR MUSIC IN YOUR 60s AS YOU DID WHEN YOU WERE 20?

Jonathan Davis, Korn

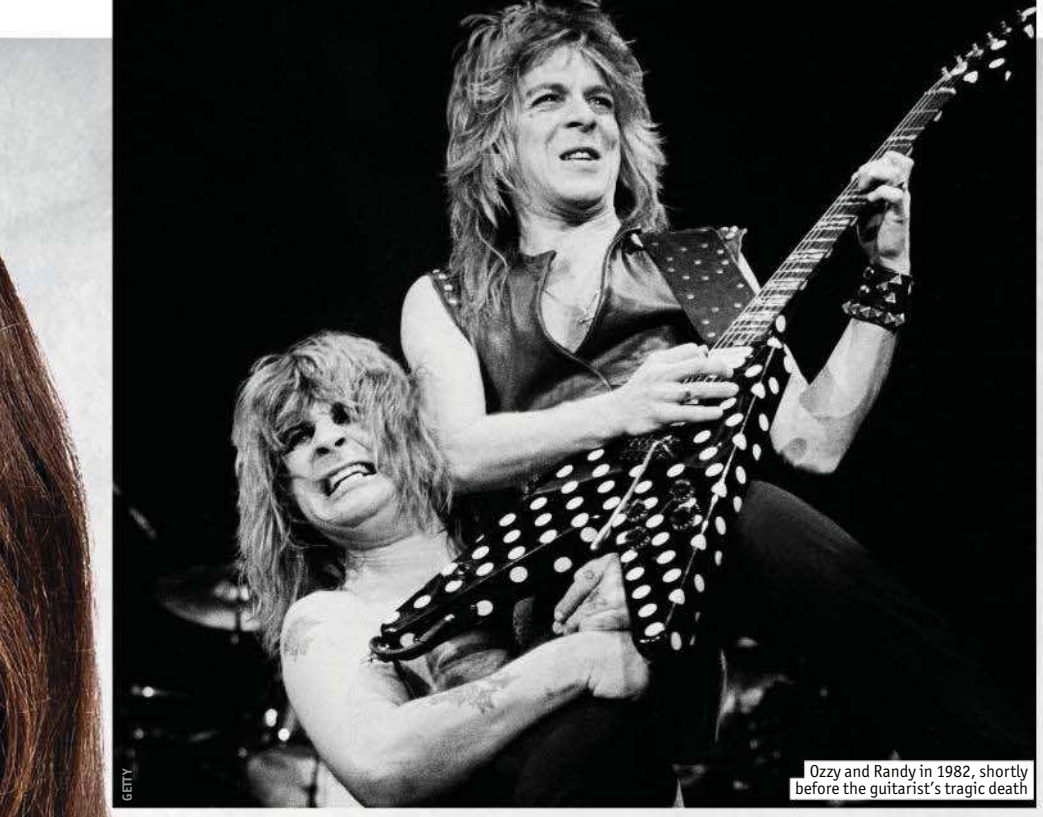
Ozzy: "To be honest with you, I don't know anything else, I'm no good at anything else. People think I'm retiring, I'm not retiring, I'm just not going to go on the road for fucking five years at a time. I'll still do gigs, just not world tours. It's in my blood. I've never done anything else for 50 years. It's a bit late in the day to go, 'I don't like music any more'! Ha ha ha!"

WAS THERE A POINT IN YOUR CAREER WHERE YOU THOUGHT, 'THIS IS REALLY BIG, I'M REVOLUTIONISING HEAVY MUSIC'?

Dani Winter-Bates, Bury Tomorrow

Ozzy: "No. With Sabbath we just *did* it. I don't know how to describe it. There were bands like Cream and Led Zeppelin, and they had this edge, and The Kinks' *You Really Got Me*. I was just playing it on my iPad, it's simple riffs, but I remember when I first heard it – it sent a chill down my spine. That's what we went for – making your hair stand on end."

Ozzy swears to tell the truth and nothing but the truth...



GETTY

Ozzy and Randy in 1982, shortly before the guitarist's tragic death

WHAT KEPT YOU GOING THROUGH THE TOUGH TIMES IN YOUR CAREER? AND WAS THERE A CERTAIN PATH THAT YOU WERE TRYING TO FOLLOW?
Simone Simons, Epica

Ozzy: "I was trying to find the path home, fucking loaded and drunk. I'm the luckiest man on the fucking face of the Earth. So many people in the last couple of years have died in the business, not only in metal, but Prince, Bowie, Lemmy… I wasn't any better. I kind of think I'm living on borrowed time anyway. I used to do cocaine, smoke dope, heroin… the lot of them over the years. I'm not saying I'm disappointed, but I really did burn the candle at both ends every day. Don't think you can take a feather out of my cap because I'm just a lucky son of a bitch."

HOW DO YOU FEEL BEING FROM BIRMINGHAM HAS INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER PATH AND HOW HAS LIVING IN AMERICA CHANGED YOUR OUTLOOK ON THOSE EARLY DAYS?
Dani Filth, Cradle Of Filth

Ozzy: "Birmingham is where I grew up. When I got married to my first wife I moved to Staffordshire, then I married Sharon and moved to London, the kids liked it in the sun in Los Angeles so they moved out here… but I don't consider myself to be an American. I still have a house in Buckinghamshire, which I go back to fairly regularly, but the work is here. I couldn't have expected to survive for 50 years in England only. I'm still English, I'm not going to put my hand on my heart and pledge my allegiance to the American flag."

HAVE YOU EVER BLOWN OUT YOUR VOICE ON TOUR OR IN THE MIDDLE OF A SHOW AND HOW DID YOU HANDLE IT?
theOGM and Eaddy, Ho99o9

Ozzy: "Every fucking night! Ha ha ha! But with brutal honesty, I had to slow the gigs down because I kept blowing my voice and I still do. You've only got one voice and it's the luck of the draw – sometimes I get away with it, sometimes I stop the show and go, 'I'm singing like a fucking asshole tonight.' You know when you're on and you know when you ain't on, but you do the best you can."

HOW DIFFICULT WAS IT FOR YOU MOVING ON AFTER THE LOSS OF RANDY RHOADS?
Brann Dailor, Mastodon

Ozzy: "I had a pretty rough time, as it happens. I remember I'd left Sabbath, gone back to Sabbath, got fired from Sabbath, my ex-wife divorced me, my father died and then just as I discovered Randy Rhoads, he gets killed. I remember looking at this burning inferno of a house where the plane had crashed, thinking, 'This is fucking insane, I'm done,' and if it wasn't for Sharon who said, 'No, you're not going to stop, Randy wouldn't have liked that, you've got to keep his memory alive…' We did Madison Square Garden with Bernie Tormé, and he was rushed in at the last minute, didn't know what he was getting into, but he did me a great favour. If it wasn't for him I wouldn't be doing it now. I'd have given up."

WHAT'S THE ONE ALBUM YOU COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT, AND WHY?
Matt Tuck, Bullet For My Valentine

Ozzy: "The Beatles turned me on to music in the first place, they covered it all, and I don't think there's a bad Beatles album. If I had to choose one, it'd be *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. There's a song on that album for nearly everyone. Sometimes people say they can hear The Beatles in my melodies, but that's the greatest thing, they had great melodies. I'm not into this growling stuff, but some people like it. One of the things I'm proud of is the fact we give people in our genre a stage at Ozzfest – all kinds of stuff comes out of that. It's my way of passing the torch on."

THERE ARE SO MANY BANDS OUT THERE WHO ARE UNAPOLOGETICALLY INFLUENCED BY SABBATH. DO YOU EVER LISTEN TO BANDS THAT SOUND LIKE YOU?
Harriet Hyde, Black Moth

Ozzy: "If I do listen to too much of the same music I play, and I like some of it, it

"WE WANTED TO MAKE YOUR HAIR STAND ON END"

SABBATH CAN CONSIDER THEIR MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Ozzy and Corey. They've both faced hurdles and lost friends, and they're both still kicking

ROCK'N'ROLL NEEDS A LUNATIC FROM TIME TO TIME"

HE SNORTED ANTS. HE BIT THE HEAD OF A BAT. WE THINK OZZY QUALIFIES...

inadvertently comes out in my stuff. When we do Ozzfest, bands say they love Sabbath, but I don't know how to take compliments, I kind of shy away from it. I just do what I do because it makes me happy, and if it makes other people happy then fine."

DO YOU ENJOY VISITING DENMARK AND HAVE YOU BEEN TO SEE ANYTHING EXCITING HERE?
Amalie Bruun, Myrkur
Ozzy: "Right at the beginning of Sabbath, we had a residency at a place there called the Revolution club and it was Tony's 21st birthday. We only had a certain amount of dough in the float and Tony was loaded, spent the fucking money, and we didn't know how we'd get home! But we managed it. In any band that I've been in, the early days have always been the funniest, because you've got nothing to lose."

WHO'S THE CRAZIEST ROCKSTAR YOU HAVE EVER COME ACROSS AND WHAT'S THE FUNNIEST STORY YOU CAN TELL ABOUT THEM?
Ben Ward, Orange Goblin
Ozzy: "Maybe it's me? Ha! I've done some pretty fucking weird things over the years. People come up to me and ask, 'Is it true you snorted a ants when you were one tour with Mötley Crüe?' Yes. But I don't do that any more. I lived the role for fucking years, but if I wanted to live to see my grandchildren I had to fucking slow down a bit. I don't drink any more, I don't smoke tobacco any more. I did all of the above and then some. Rock'n'roll needs a lunatic from time to time. The more fucked-up I was going to a gig, people were saying, 'It's going to be fun tonight, he's loaded again!'"

MY BAND AND I PLAY BLACK SABBATH COVERS AND THE ONE THING THAT ALWAYS THROWS ME OFF ARE PEOPLE SINGING THE WRONG LYRICS TO *WAR PIGS*. HAVE YOU EVER HAD THAT HAPPEN?
Liam Cormier, Cancer Bats
Ozzy: "What I have to be careful of is script books with the musical notes. One said, *'Three specks in the sky warn you you're gonna die'* [for *Electric Funeral*] when the lyrics are *'Reflex in the sky.'* Three specks? What the fuck does that mean. A speck in the sky? They must have been taking some heavy acid or something. But the crowd can sing any old shit. When I'm up there I've got the teleprompter, and I'm dyslexic so I read it backwards anyway. I'm not that serious about lyrics, as long as they're all singing and having fun I couldn't give a fuck."

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE ALBUMS FROM YOUR CAREER? BOTH SABBATH AND SOLO.
Brian Tatler, Diamond Head
Ozzy: "The first five Sabbath albums, when we were still on even terms. After [1973's] *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*, we realised we were being taken for a ride and getting ripped off. The follow-up to *Diary Of A Madman* [1983's *Bark At The Moon*], I was on a burnout. Whenever I listen to some of my old works it's like a reflection of where my head was at at the time, and Randy had just died, and I was running on overdrive all the time. To be perfectly honest, I've started playing more and more of [1995's] *Ozzmosis*. But I flip from that to *No More Tears*. It fucks me off when a record company adds another live track to a great album; the running order's the same but there's an extra track from some show I did to sell more records. They're just greedy."

IF YOU COULD LIVE ON ANOTHER PLANET, WHICH ONE WOULD IT BE?
Enid Williams, Girlschool
Ozzy: "Oh fucking hell. I've only just realised I'm living on this fucking planet – I've just landed! Never mind about going to Mars, we should try to clean this place up. In my lifetime I've seen some fucked-up things happen to this planet. It would be nice to find a new Earth with clean air."

I READ THAT ORIGINALLY *IRON MAN* WAS CALLED 'IRON BLOKE'. IS THAT TRUE, AND IF SO COULD YOU IMAGINE YOURSELF SINGING THAT SONG?
Cardinal Copia, Ghost
Ozzy: "Iron Bloke? Is this guy smoking dope? Iron Bloke. It wasn't called Iron Bloke, it's *Iron Man*. He must have been reading it on a toilet wall. It was always *Iron Man*."

IS THERE ANYTHING LEFT THAT YOU HAVEN'T DONE?
Corey Taylor, Slipknot/ Stone Sour
Ozzy: "I think I've pretty well covered it. I've had hit records, great gigs, bad gigs and bad albums. But I just don't stop at the first hurdle. After getting over the death of Randy – and to this day when I talk about it, the tape runs in my head of that day – just living through that, surviving, continuing to do what I do and having the respect of people. If it ends right now, I've got a head full of memories."

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WHEN IVAN MET ZOLTAN

WORDS AND PICTURES: MÖRAT

Five Finger Death Punch are one of metal's most combustible bands. We got their two biggest personalities to interview each other and stood back...

It's not every day that *Hammer* gets a lift home in a bright orange Lamborghini. But then, it's not every day that we hang out with Five Finger Death Punch in a Las Vegas recording studio wallpapered with their gold and platinum discs. And it's certainly not every day that we get such a candid insight into the band. We begin with the simple premise of guitarist Zoltan Bathory (owner of said Lamborghini) and vocalist Ivan Moody asking each other questions – everything they've always wanted to know about each other. We end with tears, and a bond so strong you could use it as superglue. Here's what happened...

ZOLTAN: DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME YOU MET ME? WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS?

Ivan: "The first time I actually met you was when I came to LA to audition. You and I had been talking via email, on MySpace of all things. You'd sent me *Salvation, The Bleeding* and *Meet The Monster*, and I came out with no expectations, not really wanting anything to do with the music industry, and you just took me under your arm the second I came in."

Zoltan: "You turned around and showed your back!"

Ivan: "Yeah, 'cos I was nervous. I remember you sitting there texting already, and I was like, 'Oh, I blew this one! This is gonna suck!' But you were already telling people that I was the guy. Then we went to the Rainbow and you bought me dinner."

Zoltan: "[To *Hammer*] I'd already heard him sing, so I knew he was the guy. But it took some time to get him to LA. I actually bought him his plane ticket and cancelled the ticket back, so he was stuck with us! I always have to trick him into shit. By the time he realised he was a prisoner, we were seven songs in! We had great conversations. He's a lunatic, which is something you can't fake. I had a megaphone in my car and he was hanging out of the window, screaming at people in Hollywood."

IVAN: WHAT'S THE STUPIDEST THING YOU'VE EVER READ ABOUT US?

Zoltan: "Jesus Christ, where do I start? Well, we didn't have a record label, a manager, or a booking agent, and without those things we were already getting big. Then we were on an independent label with a shoestring budget, and people were like, 'These big-money, corporate bands!' Our first record was done in my fucking living room! It doesn't get anymore DIY than that, but we'd get this corporate thing, as if it was contrived."

Ivan: "I'd have to agree with you. That's one of the most irritating ones for me, too."

ZOLTAN: WHY DO YOU HATE DOING PRESS SO MUCH?

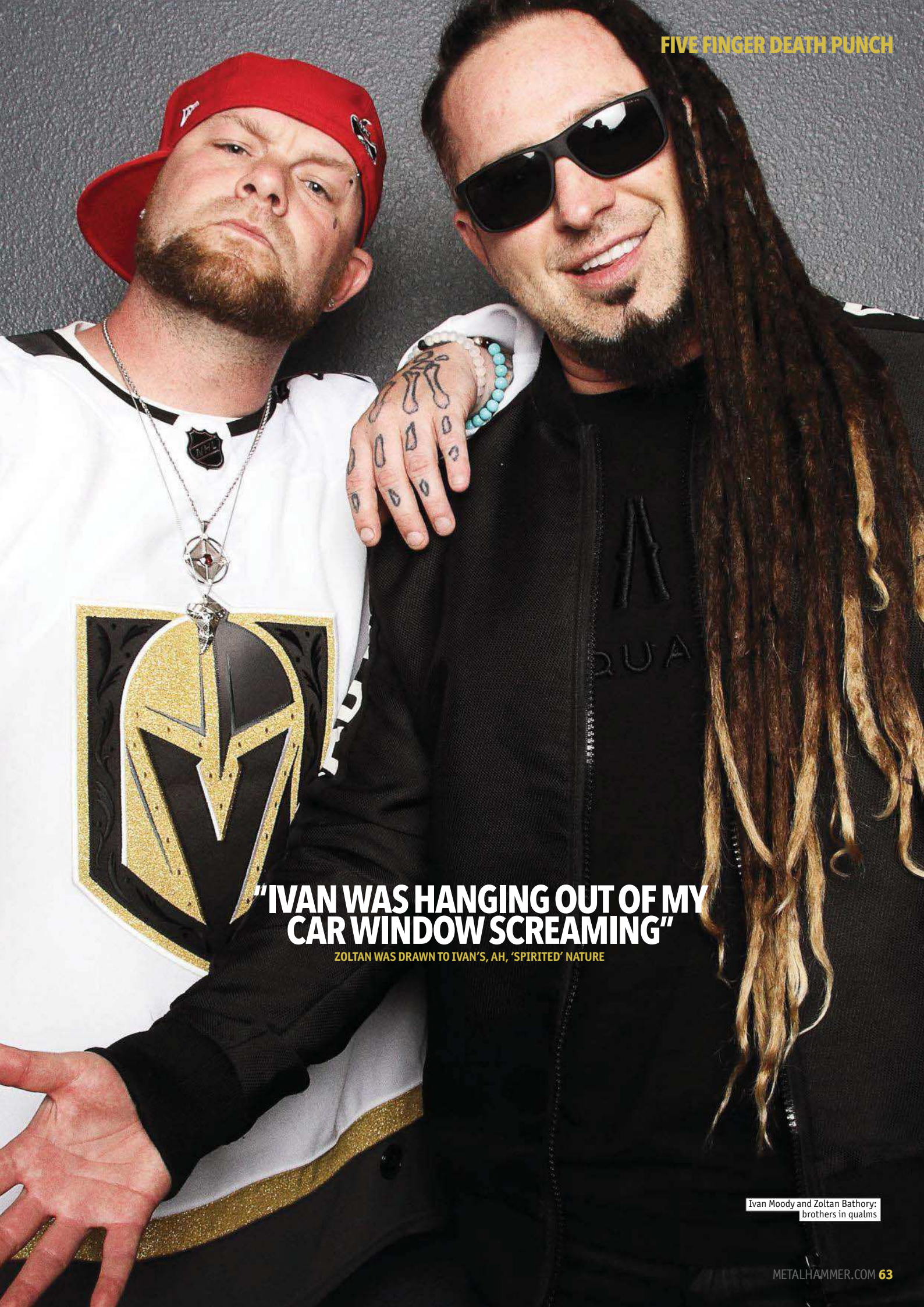
Ivan: "I'm glad you asked, because we've never really talked about this. It's not that I don't like being interviewed, it's that every time I talk, things are taken out of context, and they put all capitals on something that was a minute piece of the interview. I feel like I'm exploited a lot. It's like they want me to fuck up, because that's how they get a good story. You guys have a great gift of gab and great filters; you're less emotional. I don't Tweet or have Facebook, I don't do any of that stuff. If you read anything on Blabbermouth, they fucking hate me, and I've never done anything wrong to them. TMZ has done so much shit about me! But I love doing interviews when I'm not being taken advantage of."

Zoltan: "I'm like Spock and he's like Kirk. You're all emotion, because you're the singer. So it's easy to get to you because you react. But I don't read the garbage on Blabbermouth, and when I do it's funny. I don't like the lame ones like 'Five Finger Donkey Punch'. But sometimes people say incredibly rude things that's really funny shit, and you've got to give it to them."

IVAN: WHAT'S THE BIGGEST THING THAT DRIVES YOU CRAZY ABOUT ME?

Zoltan: "[To *Hammer*] Well, thank God, the thing that drove me crazy is now solved. When we got together, I felt like we were unbeatable, and I loved that feeling. Then, when Ivan started drinking more and more, I felt like there was an unpredictability. Which is great in some ways, but it started to happen in a way that was like, 'Is he gonna fall off stage? Am I gonna get woken up one day and he's dead in his bunk?' I felt like it wasn't fair that he was putting the rest of us in jeopardy and it wasn't fair that he was making me worry about him all the time."

Ivan: "It took me a long time to believe that I belong here. I always thought other singers were better than me, and I felt like I didn't deserve it. It was self-sabotage, and it took the longest time for me to get my head out of my ass. It makes me want to cry, actually. But I realised that it was never just ➤



"IVAN WAS HANGING OUT OF MY CAR WINDOW SCREAMING"

ZOLTAN WAS DRAWN TO IVAN'S, AH, 'SPIRITED' NATURE

Ivan Moody and Zoltan Bathory: brothers in qualms

Zoltan sending Ivan to rehab saved their band... and the frontman's life

about me, and it was selfish to think that way. For the longest time I figured I was gonna die from drinking. But once I stopped, it was different. Now I don't know how I'm gonna die. I'm curious, actually. But anticipation of death is worse than death itself, and that was something I was avoiding, because I'm scared. But anyway, on to the answer for me… there are very few things that I dislike about you. You sometimes overwhelm yourself, because you've got your hands in so much stuff, the monster trucks, martial arts… sometimes it gets to be too much, because I miss the days when it was just Death Punch. But that's just me being selfish. There's really nothing I dislike about you."

ZOLTAN: WHAT'S MY WORST HABIT?

Ivan: "You are a control freak, to some degree. You have a tendency, if something doesn't go the way you want it, to chop it off at the head. But you don't really have any bad habits: you eat well, you have the cleanest dreadlocks I've ever seen…"

Zoltan: "But I'm quick with the execution?"

Ivan: "Yeah, if you don't like it, it's a duck and you shoot it out of the sky!"

Zoltan: "I can see that. But it comes from looking three moves ahead…"

Ivan: "That's how he drives, too! He drives like *Tetris*! I'm really nervous in cars, more than nervous, I hate other people driving, and I drive like a grandma! Zo was doing almost 200mph to LA, and I started noticing that he was looking two to three cars ahead. But the control freak…"

Zoltan: "But I can see three moves ahead! See, I cut him off because I knew what he was going to say! I calculated what he was going to say! But I can see why that frustrates the shit out of him!"

IVAN: WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE AND MOST HATED LYRIC THAT I'VE EVER WRITTEN?

Zoltan: "That's a good question. *Crossing Over* was really powerful, with great lyrics. I also love *Wrong Side Of Heaven*. With Ivan's lyrics, I either absolutely love it or I absolutely hate it. But I speak with my instrument and he speaks with his voice, and I have to respect that. If he's angry, you're gonna hear it, and you're not gonna be all Shakespearean. You're gonna be 'Fuck you!' as loud as you can. We get a lot of criticism for that, but that's real emotion."

Ivan: "Remember the song I wanted to call 'Cunt'?"

Zoltan: "That song had at least 28 'cunt's in it! I'm like, 'Dude, you already hold the record for the most 'motherfucker's and 'fuck's!' There was a list of songs that had the most profanity and we were Number One by far!"

ZOLTAN: "WHAT RIFF OR PIECE OF MUSIC THAT I'VE WRITTEN HAVE YOU HATED?"

Ivan: "There is one on *Way Of The Fist* that I didn't dig at first, but we'd just got together and the material was all new to me."

Zoltan: "For me, it was *Never Enough*."

Ivan: "Yep! Zoltan hates *Never Enough*. Never liked it, never will! We actually almost quit…"

Zoltan: "We were almost fist-fighting!"

Ivan: "Our manager had to separate us! We were recording at Korn's studios in LA and we were working with this guy – I'd rather not say his name – and he came up with this idea that we should do a poppier song. I started writing to it, and Zoltan came in like, 'This is complete shit!'"

Zoltan: "I was like, 'This is everything I despise! This is exactly what we promised we'd never do!' It was the only time in our career that a third person from outside the band was involved."

"THE SHITTIEST I EVER FELT WAS WHEN I SAID WE WERE GONNA FIRE YOU"

ZOLTAN MADE AN EMPTY THREAT TO PUSH IVAN TOWARDS REHAB

IVAN: IF YOU HAD TO DESCRIBE ME IN THREE WORDS, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

Zoltan: "Fuck…"

Ivan: "Wow! That's the first one?"

Zoltan: "Grenade without pin!"

Ivan: "I like that!"

Zoltan: "He's the middle finger of this generation, but that doesn't fit in three words."

ZOLTAN: WHAT THREE WORDS DO I GET?

Ivan: "For you, I'm gonna say 'creative', 'logical', 'genius'. I was gonna say 'handsome', but that's four words."

Zoltan: "Can we have four words? I wanna be handsome!"

Ivan: "I'm not kissing your ass. You're very logical. You've never gone out of your way to hurt anyone, but if it's right, it's right, and if they don't like it, fuck 'em. Especially in business. And you are quite humble once people get to know you. And genius is not to be used lightly, but you're premeditated in just about everything you do."

IVAN: WHEN WAS THE MOMENT THAT YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD NEVER WORK WITH ME AGAIN?

Zoltan: "That point never came. I'm a solution guy and there's always an answer. Moments came when I was like, 'Fuck, I don't know the next move', but we figured it out. I guess the first time we had to stop the tour because you were becoming dangerous to yourself. I'm not gonna watch you fucking die! I felt helpless. [To *Hammer*] He's a singer and his life revolves around those two hours on stage, so the only thing I could do was take that away from him. But it was a bluff, because he's my brother and my singer. I was worried that if I bluff, then I have no cards left. That was a dark time, because I usually have the answers, but I didn't, other than, 'You have to go to rehab and you have to go now!'"

Ivan: "I wasn't happy about it, but I did it. Anybody who's ever dealt with addiction knows that it's a lifetime goal, a war with yourself. I got lost in the bottom of a bottle, and that's all there is to it. But I've always wanted to tell you, and the other guys when they read this, that you guys never gave up on me. You stood by me, even when my own family didn't. So, I thank you guys, and I love you for it."

Zoltan: "This is like therapy. Probably the shittiest I ever felt was when I said we were gonna fire you. I didn't mean it, but I felt like I was out of options."

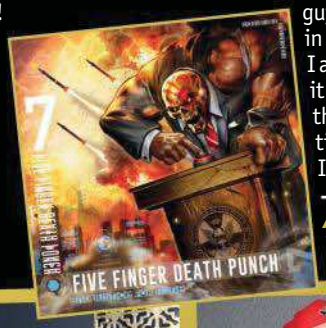
IVAN: I HAVE ONE MORE FOR YOU, AND THEN YOU CAN ASK ME ANYTHING YOU WANT. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE AS YOUR LEGACY?

Zoltan: "I spent almost a decade with Buddhist monks, so I have a different way of looking at life and understanding that we are a flash in this world, and when it's gone it means nothing. I entertain myself with buying things that I thought I could never have – cars and stuff – but that's not what makes me happy. What I get joy from, like when you got sober, is doing things for other people. When I can help the other guys, or the work we do with the veterans, and we get letters that we changed their lives… that gives me satisfaction. So the legacy is that we were more than just a band."

Ivan: "So, what's your question?"

ZOLTAN: DO YOU UNDERSTAND, AFTER ALL THAT'S HAPPENED, THAT YOU'RE THE GUY, YOU'RE OUR SINGER, AND NOBODY COULD EVER REPLACE YOU?

Ivan: "I'll answer that by saying that I appreciate it. In my household, I was constantly told that I was fucking crazy, and I was never going to amount to shit. I grew up in detention centres and jails, a couple of mental institutions, and this is all before I was 18. I was never expected to live past 21, so for a long time I had what I call the 'why me syndrome'. Because I see people I think deserve it, and they don't have it. I've been a horrible human being in the past, and a lot of my wounds were self-inflicted, so I started thinking, 'Why do I have all this power and these great guys surrounding me?' It never sank in until this last time in rehab, but I admitted to myself that I am worth it and I can love me, even if the rest of the world does not. It's taken a long time for me to feel successful, but I am the perfect imperfection." ✠



***AND JUSTICE FOR NONE* IS OUT VIA ELEVEN SEVEN**

Dan Tompkins quit Tesseract in 2011, re-joining the proggy tech metallers three years later, but he can still recall the pain of seeing them with a different singer. It was 2013, and Dan's then-band Skyharbor had been invited to support Tesseract in Russia. He shelved his pride and played the show, but can remember exactly how he felt, standing in the wings of the stage watching his erstwhile band go onto greater heights with Ashe O'Hara on vocals.

"It was terrible. I hated it," he recalls. "It was like someone was taking my baby. When I was watching *Deception [Concealing Fate, Pt. II]* I had the most overwhelming urge to just run up onstage and start singing because that was *my* song. I wrote that. Seeing people's reaction to it, going crazy, my stomach was turning inside out. I felt sick."

In these kind of situations, all you can do is pick yourself up and get back in the ring, and Dan has been laughing in the face of adversity and confounding expectations his whole life. His childhood was spent in a small town outside of Nottingham, a tight-knit community in which most of his family lived on the same street. Back then, a career in music seemed like a far-off dream, yet today he's talking to *Hammer* via Skype from his home vocal studio – physical proof of just how far determination and hard work can take you.

"My horizons were not that broad," he reveals. "It was such an unrealistic notion that I would ever be in a successful band. Who did that? I'm a kid from the middle of nowhere in this quiet mining town that's got no connections. I didn't know what I wanted to do in the future. I just knew that I liked to sing. I was painfully shy and I used to suffer with quite a bad stammer. If I had to speak in front of a group of people, I would go purple in the face. But I wouldn't shy away. I just stood up and did it."

Dan saw a speech therapist when he was young but it was singing, not the therapy, that brought him slowly out of his shell. "From a young age I knew that I had a natural ability to perform and to sing. Whenever I sang I didn't stutter, so singing for me was like a release."

Aside from those struggles, Dan had a happy upbringing, raised as an infant by his mother and his grandmother, and his youthful memories have had a wonderful impact on his music. "I had a fantastic childhood," he says fondly. "Every time I start a new album campaign, I drive out to the area and the street I grew up on to get perspective and relive those emotions. I have this vivid memory. I stayed out 'til 10 o'clock at night and we were just running and dancing in the rain, bouncing around under orange street lights and getting absolutely soaking wet. That's the freest I've ever felt and I put it in an old Skyharbor song."

Dan fell in love with metal in his teens via Linkin Park and Marilyn Manson, and by then he'd realised that, with his larynx-bending voice, he had some serious talent. However, his small-town upbringing meant that his dreams were constrained by social expectations. "I grew up with the mentality of you work hard, you get a job, you have kids and you settle down," he reveals. "I had a lot of pressure to follow that life."

> "I'VE PUT PEOPLE BEHIND BARS"

As a self-confessed softie, he surprised everyone – including himself – when he joined Nottinghamshire Police aged 18, a time when the city had been tagged by the media as gun capital of the UK. "Being a police officer, you see things that the general public are shielded from on a daily basis," he says. "I've found people hanging from roofs, I've put people behind bars. My first job was responding to a lady in an alley. She'd been stabbed multiple times in her breasts and she'd been raped and robbed. I had to grow a serious thick armour. I became very bitter, very cynical, which is why Tesseract's first album [2011's *One*] has a lot of heavy, dark topics."

Dan says all this very matter-of-factly, the result of being thrown into a world of confrontation and having to sink or swim. But behind that veneer, the things he's seen have taken a mental toll. Still, he's in the mood to share his own, painful experiences in the hope it might help others.

"I had to see a [police] counsellor for a long time because the things I was seeing affected me so much," he remembers heavily. "I dealt with a case where a lady was injected with heroin against her will, hit with a baseball bat, burnt and chained to a bed. She had kids who were so neglected they ended up burning the house down and at the end of the day... she went back to him. That was one of the hardest moments of my career as a police officer. That is what *April* [from *One*] is all about. People have asked me what that song is about for years."

You might think he's just the nice guy from the world's biggest djent band, but Dan Tompkins' life before Tesseract was a very, very different story

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICS: STEVE BROWN

Although his time in the police wasn't always easy, Dan was a high flyer, eventually rising to the top of his pay grade. Yet music proved an irresistible pull. He had discovered tech metal after hearing Sikth on the radio and, soon after, he experienced his first proper foray into the industry as a member of post-rock outfit Piano. "I would do a day shift from 7-4 then drive to London, play a gig, drive back at three in the morning and go to work at 7am because I could not let go of the idea of being in a band," he reminisces.

"There was something deep inside that was pushing me."

By the time he joined Tesseract, Dan had been a police officer for eight years. When the band were offered a record deal, he went to his employers to request a career break. They refused. "Something snapped in me," he says. "I took a massive leap of faith and resigned."

On one hand, quitting the police to go full-time with Tesseract made every one of Dan's dreams a reality. On the other, he had gone from earning a healthy salary to struggling to make ends meet. Additionally, time away on tour was putting strain on his personal relationships. "After the first year, I earned a pittance. I was frantically stressing, 'How am I going to support my family?' Every time a tour came up, I was the first to say, 'I've got reservations.' It got to the point where I didn't want to hold them back. Something had to give. If I remained in Tesseract, I may have had to sacrifice the life that I had at home. It was either one or the other."

> "I SAW THINGS THE PUBLIC ARE SHIELDED FROM"
>
> **AFTER WITNESSING HORRORS IN HIS JOB, DAN WENT FOR COUNSELLING**

While Dan grappled with the decision to leave Tesseract, he was asked to join a pop-rock act who were on the verge of signing a major record deal. All of a sudden, he had an opportunity to make a real living from music. It was a chance he couldn't turn down and, after quitting Tesseract, he once again stepped into the unknown. "I went from being a metal artist, touring around in a tiny little van, to getting flown out to Thailand and going into a five-star recording studio," he explains. "Then relationships broke down and we lost all the offers. It was a massive letdown, talk about highs and lows. I was really depressed."

During his four-year break from Tesseract, Dan had to fight relentlessly to regain his place in the music industry. Since 2010 he had been providing vocals for Skyharbor, with guitarist Keshav Dhar, and over the next five years they transformed the band from a casual, DIY project, to a going concern. Now he's a veteran musician, having released multiple albums over the years with bands including experimental pop collective White Moth Black Butterfly and the 80s-influenced ZETA.

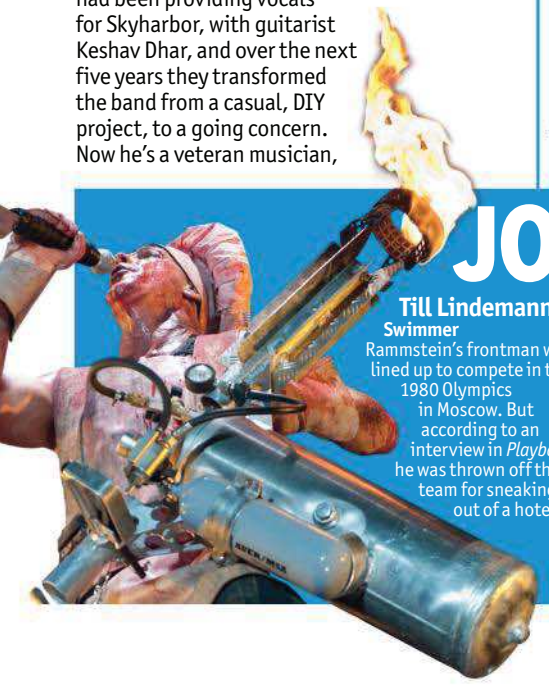
He returned to Tesseract in 2014, but this time he'd taken steps to ensure he'd never have to leave again, developing a vocal coaching business that finally allowed him to sustain a living from music. Smiling fondly, he remembers the first time he walked back onstage with Tesseract, in front of 10,000 people at Sonisphere 2014. "We rehearsed once and stepped onstage like nothing had changed. The chemistry was still there, everything. Finally I felt things were coming together again."

This is shaping up to be Tesseract's biggest year yet, as the band gear up for the release of their fourth album, *Sonder*. The title is taken from author John Koenig's online *Dictionary Of Obscure Sorrows* and defined as 'the realisation that each random passerby is living a life that's as vivid and complex as your own'.

"Someone tweeted the word 'sonder' and it really resonated with me," Dan explains. "We all live really selfish lives because we live in our own heads, but the reality is we're quite insignificant. When I started to explore the *Dictionary*, I realised this guy was literally at the forefront of linguistic progression and I think that really does go alongside the progressive nature of Tesseract."

Now with Dan firmly back in the fold, the band are in a much-needed period of stability. As well as being their most forward-thinking album yet, *Sonder* marks the first time in the band's 11-year history that they've had the same singer across two consecutive releases. Dan is happy and feeling positive about the future. "I think that time away really did us all good," he says. "But now we definitely have a long-term plan. Like, I'm not going anywhere. We want to be writing together for the rest of our lives."

***SONDER* IS OUT NOW VIA KSCOPE**



JOB RULES

Four metal heavyweights who gave up other careers for music

Till Lindemann
Swimmer

Rammstein's frontman was lined up to compete in the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. But according to an interview in *Playboy*, he was thrown off the team for sneaking out of a hotel in Florence during a competition because he wanted to do some sightseeing. The Teutonic titan went on to, um, weave baskets.

Jonathan Davis
Embalmer

Jonathan studied at the San Francisco College Of Mortuary Science, and worked in funeral homes and at the coroner's office doing autopsies. He wanted to be an investigator, but ended up quitting the death industry to try his luck in Korn, where his experiences came out in the lyrics.

Ben Ward and Martyn Millard
Footballers

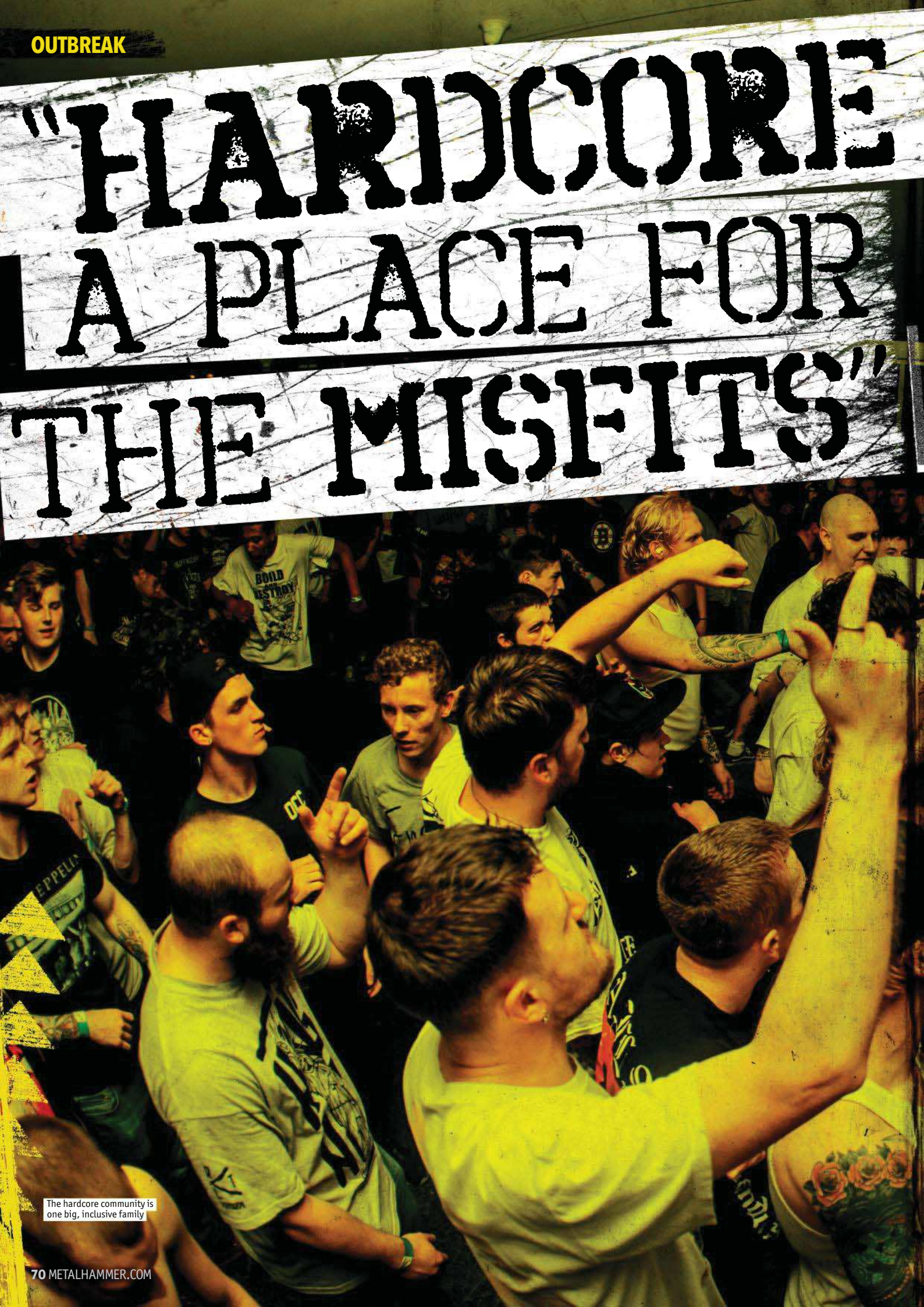
The Orange Goblin duo were both apprentices at Queens Park Rangers and quickly bonded over Metallica, with Martyn introducing Ben to heavier bands like Obituary and Napalm Death. "I had a good couple of years, but during that time I discovered heavy metal, booze and drugs, so football fell by the wayside," Ben confessed.

Ozzy Osbourne
Slaughterhouse worker

Before he was in the first heavy metal band, Ozzy had a job at a slaughterhouse in Digbeth, Birmingham. His first job there was 'puke remover', cutting the substance out of sheep's stomachs. "I threw up every hour or so for a solid four weeks," he remembered.

Tesseract (left to right): Amos Williams, Jay Postones, Dan Tompkins, James Monteith, Acle Kahney

"HARDCORE A PLACE FOR THE MISFITS"

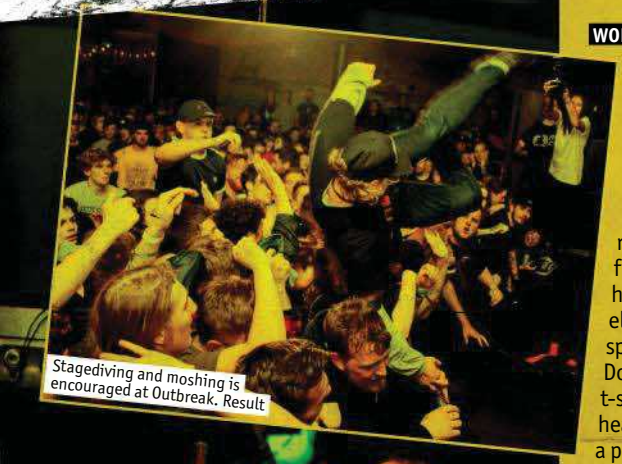


The hardcore community is one big, inclusive family

IS

As UK hardcore festival Outbreak celebrates its 10th event, we talk to headliners Code Orange, Turnstile and more about why today's scene is the most exciting it's ever been

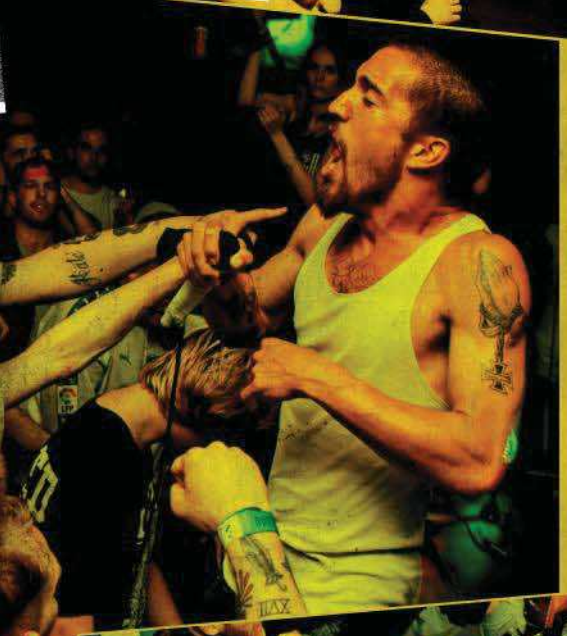
WORDS: TOM CONNICK

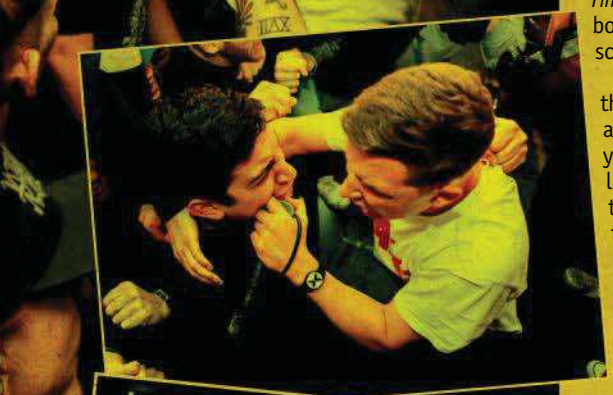


Stagediving and moshing is encouraged at Outbreak. Result

January 28, 2018. As the top-tier stars of stage and screen flock to the Grammy Awards, that all-too-saccharine, plastic excitement of 'awards season' is in full effect. But rushing the red carpet, Code Orange couldn't be further from the fancy ballgowns and thousand-dollar haircuts of their surroundings. Guitarist and electronics wizard Eric 'Shade' Balderose is sporting a leather trench coat, fellow guitarist Dominic Landolina is wearing a Type O Negative t-shirt, and lead vocalist, drummer and figure-head of the group, Jami Morgan, is clad in a purpose-made, jet-black fur coat. Their scowls are the antithesis of a Hollywood grin. They immediately turn heads and grab headlines across the globe. Like everything Code Orange do, it makes an instant impact.

The Pittsburgh punishers' appearance at the Grammys capped off a year that's seen them spearhead a new wave of hardcore. From high-profile awards ceremonies, to stadium shows in support of System Of A Down, last year's *Forever* LP saw them shrug off the sweaty basement gigs of hardcore's past. Through fusing the energy of those 80s punk origins with the power of metal, Code Orange and their peers hit upon a winning formula – one that's also been picked up by Turnstile, whose second record, *Time & Space*, sees them push hardcore's boundaries further still. It's safe to say the scene is evolving rapidly.

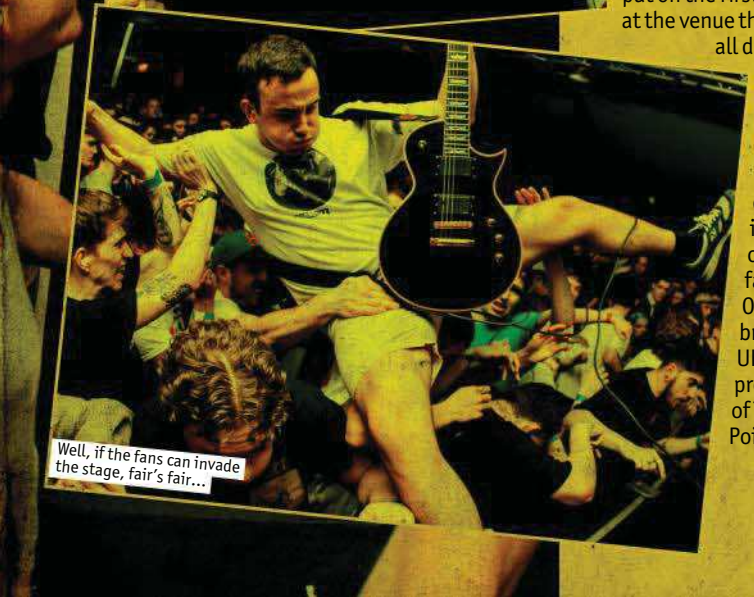




This summer, Code Orange and Turnstile top the bill at Leeds' Outbreak Festival, a rundown of all that's exciting in hardcore and beyond. This year marks Outbreak's 10th edition – another landmark moment for an underground genre that's surging forward, and not bad for a fest that started out from the humblest DIY origins back in 2011. "The first one was in a community centre in Sheffield, and there was a yoga session on before," laughs festival co-founder Jordan Coupland, who was just 14 when he put on the first Outbreak. "When we arrived at the venue there were 15-20 women there, all doing yoga. It was so weird."

With zen-seekers replaced by a swelling moshpit, Outbreak's only grown in stature. Now based in Leeds' Canal Mills event space, and drawing a 1,000-strong crowd, it's become an essential pitstop on any discerning heavy music fan's summer circuit. In 2013, Outbreak was responsible for bringing Turnstile over to the UK for the first time, and has provided a platform for the likes of Terror, Gorilla Biscuits, Turning Point, Dead Swans and more, quickly evolving from a showcase of local British talent to a worldwide go-to for hardcore's finest. Eight years in, they've built a name for themselves internationally. "It's always been really cool," enthuses Turnstile frontman Brendan Yates, himself a Baltimore native, born some three-and-a-half thousand miles from Outbreak's Leeds home, and yet aware of its impact. "It's diverse, and there's a good energy in the room."

"We have people coming from America, and places like Australia, and even Japan," says Jordan. "So yeah, this is quite a big milestone."



Well, if the fans can invade the stage, fair's fair...

Though sonically separate, hardcore's history is inexorably intertwined with metal's. From newer bands – and Code Orange tour buddies – like Trivium and Gojira, to Anthrax, Slipknot and Metallica ("...*And Justice For All* is named after the Agnostic Front record!" Jami Morgan notes), the momentum that drives metal's best is fuelled by the passion of the hardcore scene – and often a youth spent at local shows. The two go hand-in-hand when it comes to driving heavy music forward. "I can't think of one culturally important metal band that doesn't have a connection to hardcore," Jami says. "It's what makes most of those metal bands as good as they are."

"YOU CAN SHAPE THIS WORLD HOWEVER YOU WANT"

TURNSTILE'S BRENDAN YATES SEES LIMITLESS POTENTIAL IN HARDCORE

It's that crossover potential that saw Jesus Piece guitarist Dave Updike make the jump from black metal obsessive to hardcore head back at the turn of the decade. One of the newer acts on Outbreak 2018's line-up, Jesus Piece's fusion of black metal atmospherics and frenzied hardcore feels fresh, despite its grimy demeanour – another twist in the hardcore tale that could only occur given the recent leaps the scene's made.

"We came from all walks of heavier music and I think that's why what we do works out so well," Dave says. "We kind of started as a brutal death metal band, super-extreme stuff. But just from our backgrounds and being into hardcore and punk, Jesus Piece is evolving every single day." Now, they're prepping a debut album, and readily heaping praise on Code Orange for setting the scene: "We did a weekender with them and we have nothing but respect for those dudes," he says. "They've always pushed the limits and have definitely opened a lot of doors for bands like us."

That back-patting, supportive ethos is key to hardcore's staying power. "Because it's a close-knit community, and quite unusual, when a fest happens, people make the effort to come to it and everyone knows everyone," says Jordan. "A lot of stuff happens through word of mouth."

A tight-knit crowd of fans, bands, promoters and beyond keep things running through thick and thin, while near-iconic individuals like

Jesus Piece are constantly evolving, and credit Code Orange for opening the doors

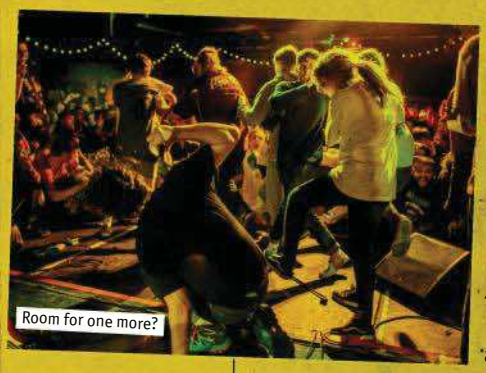
"WE'RE NOT GONNA BE A FLASH IN THE PAN"

CODE ORANGE ARE DEAD SET ON INFILTRATING THE MAINSTREAM

Justice Tripp – frontman of the Outbreak-playing Angel Du$t and hardcore heroes Trapped Under Ice, guitarist in Warfare and co-founder of DIY label Pop Wig Records – muck in wherever they're needed. The members of Turnstile, in particular, pop up in bands all over the scene, with Brendan playing drums in TUI, and Turnstile drummer Daniel Fang moonlighting in Angel Du$t. "I feel like that's one thing that makes the hardcore community so special – you're just thrown into it, and you become part of it immediately," Justice explains from his California home. "It's so small that people's involvement is mandatory."

Justice was pulled away from a rough childhood neighbourhood, and brought into hardcore as a teen, through friends and family. Introduced to a world of chaotic moshpits and caring, supportive peers – foreshadowing a mentoring role he'd later come to play for a young Brendan – he thrived. "Being real young, and being able to go to a different city and meet people who would share their world with you – and getting the opportunity to return that – it's pretty special," he continues. "Before you know it, you're just in, and that's your whole world."

Like metal, hardcore is a place where the misfits can congregate and thrive. "I wouldn't say I was a popular kid in school," Justice laughs, nervously. "I never felt understood, that I could be myself. Finding a place where I could just wear the clothes I wear, and look the way I do, and just be in an energetic space when I was a little kid and feel welcome… that does a lot for your mentality, for sure." It's a story that mirrors Outbreak's own in many ways, he admits. "It's so significant to me, how young Jordan was when he started doing that," Justice says. "I think it's one of the most special events in the world."


Room for one more?

Looking ahead, there's an excitement around hardcore that's impossible to ignore. Just as Code Orange turned heads on that Grammys carpet, their peers are demanding attention from the mainstream like never before – Turnstile's new album even features chart pop über-producer Diplo, who took on synth and production duties on the hard-hitting *Right To Be*. There's no telling what the future holds.

"I like to look at it as a world that you can shape and mould however you want," says Brendan. He stresses that every move Turnstile have made was "natural" and made without pretence, and that's the beauty of hardcore – everyone's involvement is helping push things forward organically, "whether it's starting a band, making a zine, taking pictures or whatever. You put whatever you want to see in the world, and everyone brings what they have to offer."

"I like to look at the world as way bigger than narrowing it down to a certain demographic of sounds, and not reduce it to 'hardcore is this' or 'hardcore is that'," he continues. "It's a bigger picture."

"All the bands that are breaking through at the moment aren't *just* creating music," agrees Jordan, looking to the future of his beloved scene. "They're pushing the boundaries, having fun with it and seeing how far they can go."

Through Outbreak and beyond, it seems those sky-high limits could well see hardcore make its biggest breakthrough yet. "I think we can go toe-to-toe with anyone, so why would I want to be second or third fiddle to anyone? I want us to make as big an impact as possible," says Jami, determined as ever: "We're not gonna be a flash in the pan in this bigger world." ✠

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HARDCORE HISTORY

YOUR ESSENTIAL BRIEFING ON THE ROOTS OF THE GENRE

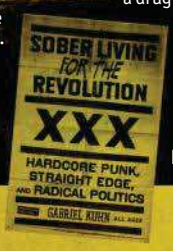
THE FILM

American Hardcore (Paul Rachman, 2006)

Compiled of clips sent in by the bands themselves, this film follows the 1980s' emergence of US hardcore – including Bad Brains, D.O.A., Minor Threat, Black Flag and more – alongside interviews with Phil Anselmo, Henry Rollins, and Red Hot Chili Peppers' Flea, all of whom owe the genre a great creative debt.

THE BOOK

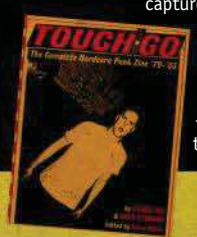
Sober Living For The Revolution: Hardcore Punk, Straight Edge, And Radical Politics (Gabriel Kuhn, 2010)



Many hardcore purists promote a drug- and drink-free lifestyle as part of their devotion to the scene. This essential guide to the straight-edge subculture will give you the know-how to impress even the oldest hardcore head, regardless of whether you're ready to take the sobriety plunge yourself.

THE FANZINE

Touch And Go: The Complete Hardcore Punk Scene '79 - '83 (Steve Millar, 2010)



Scrappy, homemade zines are perhaps the best way to understand the inclusive, do-it-yourself spirit of hardcore. Twenty-two issues of early *Touch And Go* zines compiled in one paperback, this collection captures the scene at its most vibrant and haphazard, and will soon bring you up to speed with the roots of the sound.

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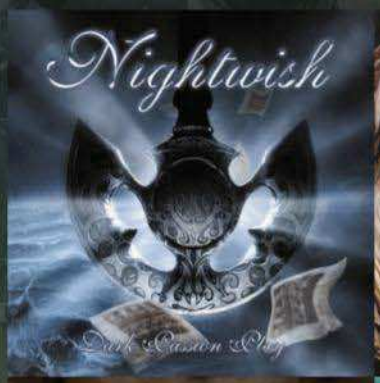

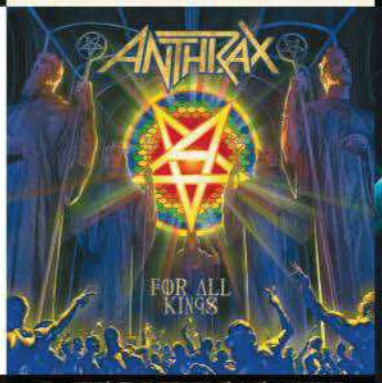

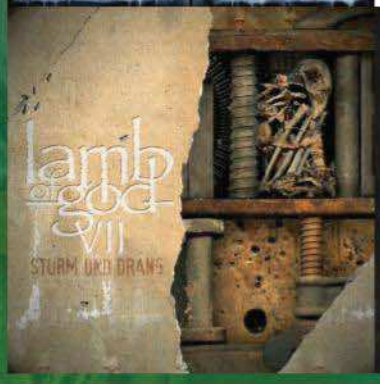

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BAPTISM OF FIRE

As Lamb Of God unleash punk-rock covers record *Legion: XX* under their old name, Burn The Priest, frontman Randy Blythe breaks down the songs that influenced the band

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

THE ACCÜSED
INHERIT THE EARTH
(MARTHA SPLATTERHEAD'S MADDEST STORIES EVER TOLD, 1988)

"I got turned onto The Accüsed from the skateboarding thing. *Thrasher* magazine had these compilations called *Skate Rock* and I still have *Volume III* on cassette. It's the crossover sound – real punk rock attitude but lots of technicality. It was the era of COC, D.R.I. and Suicidal Tendencies. It was super-aggressive and their singer, Blaine [Cook], is a really big influence on me. He growls, but he gets really up there as well. This was a pick by Chris Adler; he said to me once, 'I've found this punk rock band that plays metal!' And I was like, 'Dude, I've been listening to this band since I was a teenager.' They are one of the few bands he and I see eye to eye on."

MELVINS
HONEY BUCKET
(HOUDINI, 1993)

"This was a Mark Morton [guitarist] pick, from their major label run. I've been seeing the Melvins since about '89 and I'd have picked something from *Bullhead* or some of the unlistenable weird stuff. But it's a democratic process, and we had talked about covering it live for the GWAR barbeque and it came up again with this album, and I was like, 'Right on! That's a great song!' They're a band with a lot of musical reach, a phenomenally talented group of people."

BIG BLACK
KEROSENE
(ATOMIZER, 1986)

"I definitely wanted to cover a Big Black song, so this is one of my picks. They were the first punk rock band I heard that had a lot of cerebral weight. I remember seeing them in *Maximum Rocknroll* magazine and seeing the cover of *Songs About Fucking*, and I got more and more intrigued. This song struck a chord, as it would with anyone who lives in a small town, as I do, where nothing happens, as the song says over and over. I thought it might be a hard sell to the band – it's only two riffs – but it's more complex than it seems on the surface. I've got such a great amount of respect for [frontman] Steve Albini and his ethic, he's a super switched-on guy."

S.O.D.
KILL YOURSELF
(SPEAK ENGLISH OR DIE, 1985)

"This was a Chris Adler pick. It's the most metal song on the record, I guess. It's metal dudes doing hardcore. I don't know if I'd call S.O.D. crossover, but they're funny. We used to open our set with *March Of The S.O.D.* and then go into one of our songs, because we didn't have our own opener, so we just stole theirs! So, there is a history with us and them, and if you can't have fun with S.O.D. then you've got real problems!"

BAD BRAINS
I AGAINST I
(I AGAINST I, 1986)

"My favourite band of all time! We've been talking about covering them for about 15 years. We were on a camping trip and we were off-roading, and we were playing the *I Against I* album, and I was singing along to this song, and Mark was like, 'We should cover that, you can actually sing that!' They're the best punk rock band of all time; they own their own spot in the musical canon. This was a no-brainer for me; I wanted to show respect."

"THIS WAS A DEMOCRATIC PROCESS"

NO FISTICUFFS NEEDED TO SELECT THE TRACKS TO COVER, THEN

SLIANG LAOS
AXIS ROT
(UNRELEASED)

"Sliang Laos were a Richmond, Virginia band that were a big influence on all of us, really super-ahead of their time with smart, caustic lyrics and really technical time signatures. They recorded one album and it's never been released. Mark said, 'I really think we should do this.' And I was like, 'I'd love to.' It's a nod to our hometown, and it's my hope that it will bring enough attention to them that someone will put out this record that is lying dormant. Every time you went to one of their shows, you felt like you'd been smashed in the head with a ball hammer."

MINISTRY
JESUS BUILT MY HOTROD
(PSALM 69, 1992)

"It was totally a spur-of-the-moment thing. I came into the studio and the guys said, 'We've just covered *Jesus Built My Hotrod* by Ministry!' And I said, 'You've lost your fucking mind!' It's a really long, silly song. It's Gibby Haynes from the Butthole Surfers coming up to the studio wasted and just gibbering into the mic for two hours… and it ended up being their biggest hit! So, I really wasn't sure about it, but when we went to track it, it was so much fun. Once again it comes back to the concept of just having fun making music."

AGNOSTIC FRONT
ONE VOICE
(ONE VOICE, 1992)

"Willie [Adler, guitarist] picked this one. A buddy of mine, Matt Henderson, was in Agnostic Front at the time of this album and I sent it to him and he was really stoked. I don't know what else you can say about Agnostic Front at this point; they're the quintessential New York hardcore band – they really started something. When we started out, getting to play the Lower East Side and CBGBs was really important to us. There's so much punk rock and hardcore history out there. So, it was good for us to do, and it's not an obvious pick, either."

QUICKSAND
DINE ALONE
(SLIP, 1993)

"This was not on my radar! John [Campbell, bass] picked this one. He sent this email and prefaced it by going, 'I know you're going to shout me down on this one…' But I was like, 'Absolutely! I love *Slip*!' It is a really weird and outside-of-the-box pick when you look at the tracklisting of this album. Our producer listened to the original and then pitched it down and it sounded really similar. I have a very similar lower register to Walter [Schreifels, Quicksand frontman]. And I scream so much that if I get to do some singing then I'm happy for the change."

CRO-MAGS
WE GOTTA KNOW
(AGE OF QUARREL, 1986)

"Three different guys in the band suggested a Cro-Mags song. Mark suggested *We Gotta Know* because his high school used to cover that song at house parties. And now, here he is 30 years later, playing it again on a major label! I really liked that he got to do it twice. And even though I think Agnostic Front are the quintessential New York hardcore band, my favourite New York hardcore album is *Age Of Quarrel*, so it was really cool for me to lay vocals down to that. I've become friends with [Cro-Mags frontman] John Joseph and he's a really beautiful person."

***LEGION: XX* IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

Randy Blythe: inside this metaller beats a heart of punk

Lamb Of God. Or, in this instance, Burn The Priest again

THE STORY OF THRASH PART 2

SPREADING THE DISEASE

Master Of Puppets opened the gates for thrash's assault on the mainstream. Suddenly, metal had a new frontline, and the scene would never be the same again

WORDS: CHRIS CHANTLER

Thrash broke in 1986, and its first strike was the most deadly. Metallica's *Master Of Puppets* set new standards that still resonate today, crowning the quartet's rapid progress from pimply NWOBHM covers band to epochal giants of cutting-edge metal. "It was pretty much the definitive musical statement from that line-up, and it felt like it," Kirk Hammett told *Metal Hammer* in 2011. "Every song we came up with was just like the greatest thing."

The album's Danish producer Flemming Rasmussen confirms how special the album felt from the start. "We really tried to make everything actually better than we were capable of. We knew we had a bunch of really good songs, so we put the bar up really high," he asserts. "Musician-wise, they were a million times better because they'd been on the road for a year and a half."

However, it says much about the robust state of thrash in its watershed year that this colossal benchmark didn't overshadow the whole 12 months. Hot on Metallica's heels, Kreator unleashed their gleefully homicidal *Pleasure To Kill*, Voivod continued their leftfield trajectory with *Rrröööaaarrr*, and Flotsam & Jetsam released blistering debut *Doomsday For The Deceiver* (featuring the propulsive bass of gifted newcomer Jason Newsted). Raging debuts emerged from crossover scene leaders Cryptic Slaughter and Cro-Mags, plus new LPs from Sodom, Destruction, Holy Moses, Iron Angel and Tankard, keeping the German end up in this American-dominated year.

Meanwhile, exciting new demos continued emerging from San Francisco's Bay Area – the founding workshop of the thrash world – featuring upcoming metal royalty. Robb Flynn's first band Forbidden Evil later became Forbidden, and gave future Slayer/Testament/Exodus drummer Paul Bostaph his thrash apprenticeship. By then, Robb had decamped to Vio-lence, another Bay Area band releasing a demo of future classics in the summer of '86.

Autumn brought Megadeth's *Peace Sells... But Who's Buying?* – the full-blooded realisation of Dave Mustaine's wayward genius. With Halloween approaching, Slayer dropped their razor-sharp masterpiece *Reign In Blood*, resetting the bar celestially high for extreme thrash artistry. If any headbanger still had functioning neck muscles, by Xmas '86 there was Dark Angel's *Darkness Descends*, Nuclear Assault's *Game Over* and Sepultura's *Morbid Visions* to contend with, the year culminating with an anal bead-string of the genre's most single-mindedly intense releases.

"THRASH WAS EXPOSED TO A MASSIVE ROCK AUDIENCE"

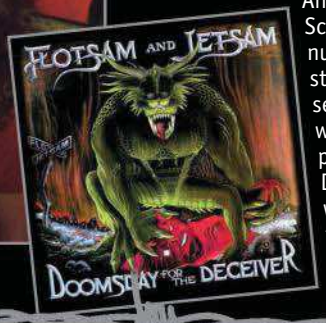
THE GENRE GOT A MASSIVE BOOST WHEN OZZY TOOK METALLICA ON TOUR

Slayer in 1986, the year they threw down the thrash gauntlet with *Reign In Blood*

After that exhaustive explosion, thrash's focus shifted. Slayer had attained the genre's pinnacle and, alongside the extremities of Celtic Frost, Kreator, Sodom and Possessed, were inspiring the nascent death metal scene in Florida to new levels of barbarism. Thrash was shedding its underdog status, evolving into a serious, acclaimed commercial force, and a 'Big 4' of scene leaders emerged as Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer and Anthrax broke through to metal's mainstream. Anthrax mastermind Scott Ian has no doubt who to credit.

"What really exposed this new sound to a massive rock audience was Metallica getting the support slot on the Ozzy tour, playing to sold-out arenas," he affirms. "Every night, 10,000 people who never heard Metallica watch them open for Ozzy and then go buy their records. Then they're looking around, 'So there's Metallica, what else is there?' Then there's that trickle-down thing, so when we go into '87 and we've got *Among The Living* coming out: right album at the right time!"

Among The Living, released in March, advanced thrash as a substantial musical form, but the success of its tour took Anthrax by surprise. Scott crunches the numbers. "We started in May '87, selling out clubs with 500-1,000 people. Cut to December '87, we're headlining to upwards of



Style icons (ahem) Anthrax in 1988. Scott Ian (right) says *Among The Living* was the right album at the right time

GETTY

Testament in 1987. Would YOU ask these men to play power ballads?!

FRANK WHITE

7,000 people a night. We were like, 'Holy shit, where did all these people come from?' Talk about being on a wave!"

Another hardworking band surfing a wave in '87 were Testament. Expectations were already high for the Bay Area quintet, after a label bidding war and fearsome word-of-mouth live reputation, and their debut, *The Legacy*, was another key album in thrash's development towards more sophisticated technical and melodic ideas. It was their first of five albums in as many years, recorded in between world tours supporting Megadeth, Anthrax, Judas Priest and Black Sabbath, with pressure from major label Atlantic keeping them constantly generating material for the next cycle.

In 1988, *Metal Hammer* grilled Testament about how they were handling 'next big thing' accolades since their debut. "We knew how high the expectations were after *The Legacy*, so we were pretty nervous at the beginning," admitted 26-year-old singer Chuck Billy. "We also knew that we couldn't let all this pressure drive us round the bend."

"THEY ASKED US TO WRITE POWER BALLADS..."

TESTAMENT WERE UNIMPRESSED BY A&R INTERFERENCE

As the 55-year-old Chuck remembers, record company pressure soon extended from backbreaking work schedules to interference in songwriting. "We had Atlantic A&R guys who were always pushing us for the new radio song or power ballad," grumbles Chuck. "I don't know if that helped or hurt our career, but you'd look back and think Testament were a ballad band, because that's what was represented by Atlantic – the more commercial, polished songs. They never picked a thrash song to do the videos for!"

Still, rather Testament's predicament than poor old Exodus. After label hassles, delays and the ousting of much-loved frontman Paul Baloff, the original Bay Area thrashers were struggling to keep up with the pack. In November '87, *Metal Hammer* opened a feature with the harsh intro: "If there is one band that's walking on this planet that completely missed the boat, that band is Exodus." By the end of the 80s, Exodus were lining up a deal with major label Capitol, but it wasn't a natural fit (for more on this, see part three next month).

In the feeding frenzy of the late-80s, every record company wanted the new Metallica, as derivative, underdeveloped garage bands were plucked from obscurity and ill-fatedly groomed for stardom. A genre founded on uncompromising underground principles didn't take well to corporate interference, and many thrashers in '88 dared to express fears that Metallica, Slayer, Anthrax and Megadeth had failed to meet expectations with each of their major label albums that year, while ravenous hopefuls like Death Angel, Forbidden, Vio-lence, Heathen, Sacred Reich, Holy Terror, Xentrix and Annihilator were snapping at their heels. New Jersey scene veterans Overkill, however, continued to triumph. Frontman Bobby 'Blitz' Ellsworth recalls the heady competitive spirit between rising bands at this time.

"There was camaraderie, because we were cut from the same cloth, but it's like being in a room of cousins; you're still competing against them!" he cackles. "You didn't go in to lose, you went in to win. So it was a very healthy type of formulation; I think it made all the bands better."

Sodom's Tom Angelripper concurs. "There was rivalry around the bands but without any malevolence or

GETTY

Megadeth released the classic *Peace Sells... But Who's Buying?* in 1986

GETTY

Metallica: the leaders of the pack. Not much has changed, then...

FRANK WHITE

Voivod in 1987. They really should have been huge

fights," he remembers. "We were all good friends and spent a lot of time together, having parties and celebrating the music."

Germany had much to celebrate in this period. If the Big 4 were stepping down a gear, ripping Teutonic volleys like Sodom's *Persecution Mania* and *Agent Orange*, Kreator's *Terrible Certainty* and *Extreme Aggression*, Holy Moses' *Finished With The Dogs* and Destruction's *Release From Agony* displayed increasing confidence and mastery of craft. "We were blown away by the opportunities to become a touring band – it was so exciting," enthuses Kreator frontman Mille Petrozza of thrash's late-80s heyday. "We brought that excitement into the studio, and you can hear that. We wrote furious, in-your-face stuff, but it was tighter than before, so we were on a good path."

Kreator weren't alone. Thrash was diversifying in increasingly bizarre directions; Nottingham loons Sabbat added pagan folk mysticism, multi-ethnic San Franciscans Mordred fused thrash with funk, while The Great Kat was doing... whatever she was doing. However, the most fascinating innovations in this period were spearheaded by invaluable Canadian world-builders Voivod. Many thrash pioneers identify Voivod as the band that should have been huge. "I thought they were really poised to grab the golden ring of this," ponders Bobby 'Blitz' Ellsworth, while Mille adds, "In my opinion, they were the biggest of us all."

In Voivod's wake came a slew of technical, progressive free-thinkers – Blind Illusion, Coroner, Watchtower, Anacrusis, Sadus, Realm, Toxik, Sieges Even, Mekong Delta – each warping boundaries of eccentric creativity with virtuosic thrash panache. "I notice there are a few bands who've changed their musical direction towards something more progressive, which I think is an influence they took from Voivod," commented Voivod drummer Michel 'Away' Langevin in *Metal Hammer* in November 1989, "but I think we're still alone in this kind of vein."

It was awesome stuff, but it remained pretty niche, whereas one far-reaching LP in 1989 unexpectedly proved a profound critical and commercial smash. After a sloppy infancy, Brazilian teenagers Sepultura had well and truly got their shit together to deliver the incisive masterwork that their new label Roadrunner had been hoping for: *Beneath The Remains*. In a review in November '89, *Metal Hammer* gushed: "Sepultura have not only progressed considerably as musicians, they are also one of the best live acts on the entire thrash scene and can stand the comparison with Metallica, Exodus or even Slayer no problem."

Beneath The Remains seemed to set the seal on 80s thrash while pointing the way to even hotter intensities for the 90s. But with Sepultura making the rest of the scene look tame and mainstream by comparison, how much of a future was there for thrash metal as it entered its second decade? ✠

DON'T MISS PART THREE OF THE STORY OF THRASH IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF *METAL HAMMER*, ON SALE JUNE 21

THRASH HITS:
SIDE TWO ('86-'89)

METALLICA
Battery
(Master Of Puppets, 1986)
A beautiful acoustic melody is shattered by a merciless volley of heads-down riffs, proving that the scene's biggest band were still the best at thrashing.

MEGADETH
Black Friday
(Peace Sells..., 1986)
The LP was versatile and full of personality, but with this stalk-and-slash classic Dave Mustaine rivalled even the mighty Slayer for full-speed sadistic depravity.

SLAYER
Angel Of Death
(Reign In Blood, 1986)
Pouring buckets of toxic Nazi controversy over several of metal's all-time greatest riffs, Slayer were boldly thrashing where no band had thrashed before.

KREATOR
Pleasure To Kill
(Pleasure To Kill, 1986)
"We really, really worked hard on that album," attests frontman Mille Petrozza, and it shows in the concentrated aggression of this breathtaking thrash attack.

ANTHRAX
Caught In A Mosh
(Among The Living, 1987)
Anthrax really had their own thing going, Scott Ian's exuberant crunch and Joey Belladonna's melodic pipes a unique combination, especially on this classic narked anthem.

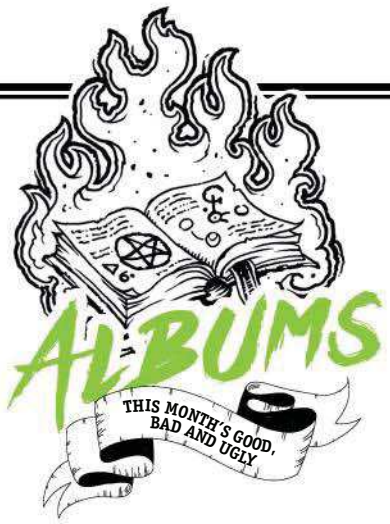
TESTAMENT
Over The Wall
(The Legacy, 1987)
Opening Testament's high-stakes debut, this is Bay Area thrash in a nutshell: killer riffs, pounding tempos, slavering vocals, and the fluid melodic leadwork of guitar prodigy Alex Skolnick.

SODOM
Nuclear Winter
(Persecution Mania, 1987)
Refining their early chaos, Sodom signalled newfound focus with this immersive whirlwind opener, a prime exemplar of thrash's late-80s nuclear war obsession.

VOIVOD
Macrosolutions To Megaproblems
(Dimension Hatröss, 1988)
Constructing a parallel thrash universe of their own, Voivod honed their extraordinary vision on four albums from 1986-89. If you don't own them all, buy them immediately!

XENTRIX
No Compromise
(Shattered Existence, 1989)
A spirited cry of defiance in the dying days of the 80s, from Preston. Xentrix deserved their shot at glory, but couldn't surpass the inspirational fervour of this rousing singalong.

SEPULTURA
Mass Hypnosis
(Beneath The Remains, 1989)
You can take your pick from this album, really, but the dark, atmospheric twists and boiling chemistry are damn-near definitive on the incredible *Mass Hypnosis*.



GHOST

Prequelle

SPINEFARM

The guys and ghouls return in Biblical fashion

PLEASE BE SEATED. You are about to receive the fourth sermon from twisted Swedish clergymen Ghost. But first, some background for the heathens: after every album, the band 'change' singer. Papa Emeritus III was removed last year, and a new emissary called Cardinal Copia was installed by the mysterious holy order. Meanwhile, in the real world, freshly unveiled frontman Tobias Forge has been embroiled in a lawsuit with his former backing band of masked 'nameless ghouls' – but that outside turmoil hasn't dimmed his creative vision. *Prequelle* is a dizzying, all-consuming rock opera delivered with convincing evangelical zeal.

The stage is set with creepy intro *Ashes*, a reworking of the classic plague rhyme *Ring A Ring O' Roses*, before *Rats* digs its claws in with the biggest hook since *Square Hammer*. Despite its medieval theme, the music is a homage to the 80s, as with much of this record. The band have long enjoyed a love affair with the era (most obviously on their *If You Have Ghost* and *Popestar* EPs, featuring covers of Roky Erickson, Eurythmics and more), with major chords and warm production bumping up against grotesque, devilish lyrics. The religious rapture of third track *Faith* is offset by insidious whispers and an almost subliminal horror-movie laugh, nailing that schlocky vibe Ghost do so well, walking a line between parody and thrills. Organ-augmented ballad *See The Light* combines gentle worship with Holy Communion metaphors about rotting flesh.

But the most perfect culmination on this record is in *Pro Memoria*; its sweet string, piano and choral melodies rain down like beautiful

blessings, while the catchy vocal refrain bears the message: *'Don't you forget about dying, don't you forget about your friend death'*. Cheers, Cardinal Copia.

Bombastic grandeur aside, *Prequelle* takes some surprising turns, including two proggy instrumentals. The none-more-retro *Miasma* subliminally recalls *Majestic* from last album *Meliora* and sounds like an extended action sequence, climaxing in an enthusiastic saxophone solo. Meanwhile, *Helvetesfonster* is like a reprise of *Pro Memoria* combined with the theme tune from *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*. Though disarming on first listen, they cleverly connect Ghost songs past and present, and make the record feel like a grand musical. It's easy to imagine how these interludes might work onstage – maybe even during set changes – for this most theatrical of bands. Now they've headlined Bloodstock, is Broadway next?

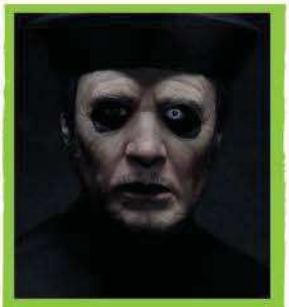
The repeating refrains breed familiarity, so the album is full of proper earworms beyond the choruses, adding a layer of seductive subtlety to a deliberately over-the-top album. Cultish closer *Life Eternal* is a mellowed-out grand finale – a moment of *'just letting go'* that even includes a sparkly shooting star sound. The whole record brims with a nostalgic yet timeless affection, not to mention a huge sense of fun, and a dose of escapism that's badly needed in these turbulent times. It's a faith-healing session run by a perverse preacher. It's *Jesus Christ Superstar* made over by Satan. It's their most fully realised statement yet. And so, in the year of our lord 2018, Ghost have delivered *Prequelle*. And lo, it is good.

9

FOR FANS OF: **Queen, Mercyful Fate, The Rocky Horror Picture Show**

ELEANOR GOODMAN

Ghost: Cardinal Copia prepares to create some panda-monia



Tobias Forge

VOCALS

HOW HARD IS IT TO GET WHAT'S CONCEIVED IN YOUR BRAIN ONTO AN ALBUM AND ONTO A STAGE?

"As with most people needing control, it's always annoying that your exact vision is hard to bring to life. You can't just print it out and all of a sudden, 'Ta-da!', there it is. But on the other hand, I've come to cherish that, clearly, what I'm trying to convey and enjoy seems to be of such nature that it inspires others as well. So, it gets people moving!"

NOW THAT THE BAND ARE GETTING SO BIG, DOES THAT IMPACT ON THE KIND OF SONGS YOU WRITE?

"From a songwriting point of view, I tend to write songs that I think will feel good. Even though there might be a song on the record that is an 'album track' and won't work so much live, there's definitely a radar that's, 'This will not feel good for the crowd. It's better that we do *this*.' You know, if it feels good for the crowd, it feels good for you. It's like nurturing a relationship, or a sex life, in a way. But it wouldn't happen if you didn't have a crowd."

IT'S ALMOST A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP...

"Exactly, and I think that's the same thing as if you're doing a film franchise, or you have a restaurant. You listen to your customers. 'Oh, you don't like glazed Cleveland steamers?'"

SO THE FANS ARE IMPORTANT TO YOUR PERCEPTION OF WHERE GHOST GOES NEXT?

"Ghost is very much directed from a fan point of view. From my *own* fan point of view. I'm trying to fill Ghost with the things that I would have liked to see if I had not been in the band."

SPECTRAL ANALYSIS *FOUR PREVIOUS GHOST CUTS*

Opus Eponymous

RISE ABOVE – 2010

Rough around the edges by the standards of what came next, all of the ingredients are still present and correct on Ghost's debut. We said that "if *Hammer* recruited an in-house band, Ghost would get the job". And we stand by that!

Infestissumam

LOMA VISTA – 2013

The first sign of things to come, as Ghost suddenly and successfully introduced the lush, layered production and vocal harmonies that have become their trademark. Not as heavy as many had hoped, but a necessary step in Tobias Forge's masterplan.

Meliora

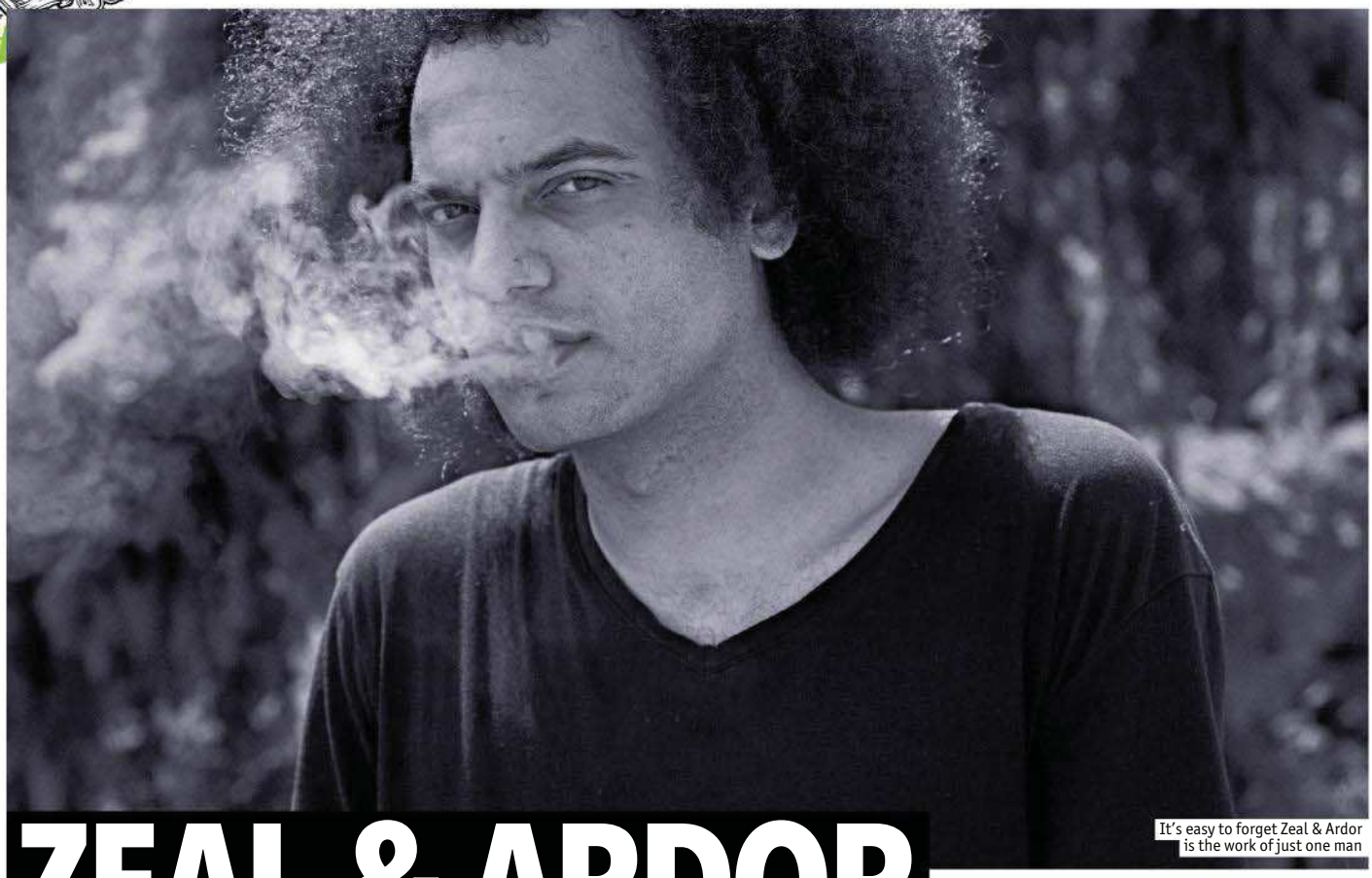
LOMA VISTA – 2015

An ambitious step, *Meliora* saw Ghost crank up the fuzz and saturate their ever-more-prog, occult-obsessed rock with enough riffs and solos to please even the most cynical metalhead. In retrospect, *He Is* undeniably offered a taste of things to come.

Popestar

LOMA VISTA – 2016

The EP that changed everything. As well as hinting at *Prequelle*'s 80s influences by covering Eurythmics and Echo & The Bunnymen, *Popestar* changed the world of metal by providing Ghost with their first solid-gold rock club banger: *Square Hammer*.



It's easy to forget Zeal & Ardor is the work of just one man

ZEAL & ARDOR

Stranger Fruit

RADICALIS/MVKA

Black metal/spiritual alchemist weaves his magic once more

COMING OUT OF nowhere in 2017, Manuel Gagneux, aka Zeal & Ardor, changed the metal game. On his debut album, *Devil Is Fine*, the Swiss-American combined traditional Afro-American and Christian genres like gospel, soul and slave songs with Scandinavian black metal – not only in sound but also in philosophy and belief. The result was deeply odd, fascinating and blasphemous on every kind of level. Not only had it never been done before, it was also executed in a manner that simply left you speechless. So how do you carry on from an extraordinary, hyped debut like that? As it turns out: with sheer musical brilliance.

Where *Devil Is Fine* was a clash between different worlds and extremes, *Stranger Fruit* sees multi-instrumentalist Manuel fuse them. The contrasts and opposites don't work against but with each other; it's not a battle anymore, it's a symbiosis. About two years after first releasing songs under the Zeal & Ardor moniker, the musician naturally draws on means he has used before on this album; the anthemic call-and-response moments and the somewhat creepy synth interludes that give you some time to calm down between songs were crucial elements for the satanic spirituals of *Devil Is Fine*. But the atmosphere has changed a bit; instead of the heavy noise of chains weighing you down, *Stranger Fruit* elevates the listener with the sound of chirping birds and dripping

water – all while keeping up the eerie, morbid and devil-worshipping vibe that made Zeal & Ardor so intriguing in the first place. But while a track like *Fire Of Motion* – notably the most feral, aggressive thing the one-man-project has ever recorded – hits you like a well-placed punch in the stomach, *Stranger Fruit* impressively proves one thing in particular: Manuel Gagneux could easily be a successful mainstream artist – keep in mind that he wrote, composed and recorded all of his schizophrenic, peculiar songs by himself (plus a drummer on his sophomore record). The soulful melodies of his songs and their undeniable catchiness will haunt you in your sleep, softly breathing lines like *'You are bound to die alone'* and *'Don't let anybody tell you that you're saved'* into your soul. In that regard, two absolute highlights of the album are the passionate R&B track *You Ain't Coming Back* and the epic album finale, the gospel-choir-accompanied ballad *Built On Ashes* that, despite their heavy guitar work, put many big pop stars to shame.

Working your way through the 16 tracks, you are confronted with a lot that is going on, as the album constantly walks a tightrope between brute force and sensitivity, from blastbeats to chorals to piano parts. But you never feel lost in this eclecticism, because the essence of what Manuel does is crystal clear. All the different feelings, sounds and styles add up to one big picture. They tell a coherent story – nothing about it is random. Most importantly, despite the experimental and conceptual underlying idea, the music is deeply authentic and moving, not to forget the socio-critical level of this project that deals subtly with the suppression and abuse of black people in America both in the era of slavery as well as the present day. And while Zeal & Ardor has always been a style unto itself, *Stranger Fruit* has just taken it to a whole new level.

9

FOR FANS OF: Oranssi Pazuzu, Cobalt, Ulver

CHRISTINA WENIG

THE AMSTERDAM RED LIGHT DISTRICT

Sapere Aude

SELF-RELEASED

French metalcore hopefuls tease a satirical slant

If you're somebody who adores the late-00s metalcore stylings of Bring Me The Horizon or The Devil Wears Prada, then congratulations: The Amsterdam Red Light District are your new favourite underground band! From the rock'n'roll melodies to the hard-hitting metal grooves to the punk-derived succinctness, everything that their new album, *Sapere Aude*, does feels cynically executed to attract the same large, fun-loving crowd that made stars of names like A Day To Remember. The vast majority of the album is mindless, visceral entertainment; however, the closing title track takes an abrupt u-turn, wittily sewing together excerpts of controversial Donald Trump speeches to lampoon the American President. In future, if these energised Frenchmen could further integrate this type of satirical subversion within the main body of their music, we could have a legitimate stand-out on our hands. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Asking Alexandria, BFMV, Press to MECO

MATT MILLS

BAPTISTS

Beacon Of Faith

SOUTHERN LORD

Expansive hardcore punks hold up a beacon for the lost

The third album by Canadian hardcore punk crew Baptists expands the musical experimentation that previous releases hinted at. Combining emotional sandpaper vocals, a massive guitar resonance and a pummelling percussive sound, *Beacon Of Faith* is an impassioned, densely packed record. Lyrics centre around systematic failings such injustices at the hands of the court system, the epidemic of opioid drug abuse and the lack of mental health support, resulting in one angry, embittered album. Having production god Kurt Ballouback behind the deck allows the band to explore an expanded, trademarked noise rock palette. Not outstaying their welcome over the 13 tracks herein, Baptists have taken a hard yet thrilling look at today's fractured world, creating a soundtrack for the brutality and frustrations of modern life. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Converge, Black Flag, Nails

CRAIG HUNTLEY

BLACK STONE CHERRY

Family Tree

MASCOT

Southern rock stalwarts dig deeper from the well

Black Stone Cherry don't make bad albums, but this one takes them to a new level. All the obvious roots are still embedded – the Southern impact, the riotous 21st-century blues, the hummable tunes – but there's a joyously live atmosphere throughout *Family Tree*. The band are clearly playing with huge grins as they stomp through the swamp on *Dancin' In The Rain* – with guest guitarist Warren Haynes from Government Mule – and unleash a pop/rock anthemic groove for *Bad Habit*. Appropriately, *James Brown* has a soul pulse, while *Get Me Over You* nods towards prime Lynyrd Skynyrd. It gives off the vibe of a band who didn't have everything worked out before they went into the studio, but let the music take them in spontaneous directions instead. This is BSC paying homage their heroes, but making their own mark on the Southern rock canon. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Blackberry Smoke, Clutch, Lynyrd Skynyrd

MALCOLM DOME

BLEEDING THROUGH

Love Will Kill Us All

SHARPTONE

Resurrected metalcore mavens restock their top drawer

When Bleeding Through announced their split in 2012 after the excellent *The Great Fire*, it felt like the Californians were ducking out in their prime. *Love Will Kill Us All* proves that they still have plenty of that gas left in the tank. The veteran metalcore crew always stood out from their peers by mixing up their sound, and again they have combined liberal amounts of black, death and symphonic elements to create a truly intense and atmospheric record. *Fade Into The Ash*, *Cold World*, *Buried* and *No One From Nowhere* are all stone-cold killers, exploding in whirlwinds of fiendish riffs and barraging drums. They're balanced by *End Us*, which shows off their razor-sharp melodic streak, and a Trivium-esque chorus. This is an impressive comeback that's tight, hungry and wired with the kind of energy younger bands can only sniff at. **8**

FOR FANS OF: As I Lay Dying, Killswitch Engage, Unearth

DANNII LEIVERS

Burgerkill head towards the top tier

BURGERKILL

Adamantine

BKHC

Indonesia's metal kings set out to build their empire

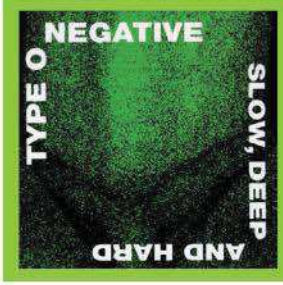
OVER THE LAST seven years *Hammer* has been proud to shine the spotlight on unique metal communities across the globe, often in countries where circumstances make holding the metal standard aloft is difficult and even dangerous. The first of these was the burgeoning Indonesian scene, and Bandung's Burgerkill stood proud and loud at the head of it. And while 2011's raw *Venomous* underlined their status in their homeland, *Adamantine* is a genuine world-beater, light years ahead of its predecessor in terms of production, songwriting craft and sonic impact. Discounting the short intro and serene instrumental *Celestial*, Burgerkill set out their manifesto in seven uncompromising tracks, seamlessly combining the technicality of death metal with the intensity of thrash and the addictive riffs of the likes of Lamb of God and Pantera. Straight out of the blocks, *Pledge To Fight* raids the senses with a devastating combo of riffs, maintaining massive groove without abandoning ferocity or skill. As opening statements go it's impossible to find fault, but if you're still not convinced then *United Front* and *Integral*'s skilful yet insanely catchy fusion of guitars and punchy rhythms perfectly lay the base for frontman Vicky's savage vocals, before *Undefeated*'s stabbing tempos set up a rousing chorus. Even when the band change gears on *Superficial*'s slower, more menacing descent, *Adamantine* is a convincing statement from a band with fresh perspectives and big goals, with only the out-of-place melodies on the cover of Iwan Fals' *Air Mata Api* and the limited tracklisting minor gripes on an otherwise astonishing collection. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Devildriver, Decapitated, The Haunted

ADAM REES

THIS MONTH IN METAL

ALBUM MONOLITHS FROM THE VAULT



TYPE O NEGATIVE *SLOW, DEEP AND HARD*

ROADRUNNER *JULY 1991*

Described by *Hammer*'s representative, Anthony Noguera, as "without doubt the strangest, most evil, menacing record I have heard all year", *Slow, Deep And Hard* was the debut studio album from Type O Negative – the first made by the New Yorkers since Peter Steele's exit from Carnivore. Coloured by the singer/bassist's dry humour, Anthony found it "hard to review – not least because of the harsh sexual and violent overtones" that ran though songs such as *Unsuccessfully Coping With The Natural Beauty Of Infidelity* and *Prelude To Agony*. Awarding four out of five, he nevertheless summed up: "Steele signed his record deal in blood and semen; this is the work of a very twisted and menacing mind."

Don't let appearances fool you: Lamb Of God are a bunch of gutterpunks

BURN THE PRIEST

Legion: XX

ROADRUNNER

Lamb Of God salute their punk and hardcore heroes

ALTHOUGH LAMB OF God have never given any impression that they would be prepared to compromise for greater success, the band's last album, *VII: Sturm Und Drang*, and subsequent standalone single, *The Duke*, both hinted at a slight mellowing of approach. Whether the mixed response both received had any influence on the quintet's decision to revive their original moniker and slap together a brutish and snotty covers album will doubtless remain a mystery, but *Legion: XX* definitely feels like a furious reaction to *something*. Ostensibly a tribute to the punk, hardcore and underground rock bands that fuelled their youthful musical efforts, Burn The Priest's song choices alone make this vastly more appealing than most similar projects. We know these men can play thunderous groove/thrash metal, and so rather than state the obvious with Slayer and Testament covers, we can marvel at precisely how eyeball-poppingly incensed Randy Blythe sounds on the opening demolition of The Accused's *Inherit The Earth* and how disgustingly heavy Bad Brains' *I Against I* becomes in the hands of musicians with deep roots in punk rock *and* heavy metal.

The best moments are the curveballs: a genuinely unhinged lurch through *Axis Rot*, a song originally performed by Sliang Laos, whom Randy has described as "probably the greatest band ever to come out of Richmond"; a bruising and wickedly claustrophobic reworking of the Steve Albini-led Big Black's crowning glory, *Kerosene*; and most riotous of all, a full-throttle Lamb-ified clatter through Ministry's *Jesus Built My Hotrod*, which somehow manages to sound even more joyously off-its-chuff than the original. Chuck in balls-out, bellicose renditions of songs by Quicksand, Melvins, S.O.D., Agnostic Front and Cro-Mags, and this could hardly be a better reminder that Lamb Of God/Burn The Priest are just pissed-off gutterpunks at heart. Those beards are fooling no one after this.

8

FOR FANS OF: **Dead Kennedys, Sick Of It All, Ministry**

DOM LAWSON

BORNBROKEN

The Years Of Harsh Truths And Little Lies

SELF-RELEASED

Grumpy Canadian thrashers take aim at injustice

Apocalyptic thrashcore bunch BornBroken wear their political bent on their sleeves. From *The Years Of Harsh Truths And Little Lies*' Bansky-esque artwork to the on-the-nose, 'Take that, politics!' sentiment of its title, their anti-establishment sentiment is layered on thick. It's hard to argue with their anger, in fairness. Tackling everything from inequality to government conspiracies, the Canadian band's fury is aimed in all the right directions. *'We'll never let you forget what we're fighting for'* vocalist Pepe Poliquin roars on latter-half highlight *Fight*, while the bell hits of the title track's breakdown feel like a call to arms. There's the odd stumble, most notably in the crowbarred-in rap verses of *Torn* and *Whitewashed*. Elsewhere, though, BornBroken's unrelenting pace is proof that, even in the supposedly docile nation of Canada, there's still plenty to rally against in 2018.

7

FOR FANS OF: **Lamb Of God, Stray From The Path, Napalm Death**

TOM CONNICK

THE EVER LIVING

Herephemine

CHROMISM

UK post-metallers find a light in the darkness

The debut album from London's The Ever Living is a textured journey full of ambition and self-assured design that brings together crunchy post-metal, atmospheric keyboards and a maturity that belies the band's short career. *Herephemine* contrasts light and shade and in opener *The Great Defeatist* the band marry dark textures and Chris Bevan Lee's gruff vocals with soaring synthesised lines that aim to bring a little hope into proceedings despite the melancholic undercurrent that underpins down the track. The Ever Living pull much of their weight from incandescent guitars that burn bright in the dark world the band have created; *Foreboding Epiphany* flares with subtle melody while *Interrotron* screams with rage. At 66 minutes long, *Herephemine* does take a dip in the mid-section but it's a small criticism on a record that shines with promise.

7

FOR FANS OF: **Cult Of Luna, Rosetta, Year Of No Light**

CHERYL CARTER

GOD IS AN ASTRONAUT

Epitaph

NAPALM

Irish instrumentalists stick to the same flightpath

Instrumental trio God Is An Astronaut have a specific and consistent sonic vision that they've been delivering for 16 years, their speciality: slowly-building sonic landscapes followed by the huge tension-releases that mark them as part of *Hammer*'s world. When the Irishmen properly let rip on their ninth album, the contrast to what's come before makes the heaviness hit like a jack-knifed 18-wheeler. And it's not just distorted guitars – on *Winter Dusk/Awakening*, drummer Lloyd Hanney conjures up an aural tornado that tears through the relative calm surrounding it, while *Komorebi* is a five-and-a-half-minute crescendo. The problem is that GIAA rarely stray from this slow-build/heavy-release model, resulting in a release that's strangely repetitive – not in the same way as an overused hook, but in its use of mood and texture. *Epitaph* isn't a bad record by any means, but one in need of considerably more variation.

6

FOR FANS OF: **Sigur Rós, Spurv, Explosions In The Sky**

ROB BARBOUR

SMALL MERCIES

THE NEW BLOOD

BENEATH THE SILENCE

Phoenix

SELF-RELEASED

Ear-catching grooves collide with soaring vocals on this sophomore EP for an effervescent sojourn into melodic metal territory. There's nothing out of the ordinary, but hook-laden cut *Ashes* lifts it above the prosaic. **[6]**

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

BETWEEN OCEANS

Oxymoron

PRIME COLLECTIVE

Melody is Between Oceans' biggest calling card and they play it very well. *Oxymoron*, their debut EP, blends huge choruses and bruising riffs on five tracks that are occasionally generic but also occasionally brilliant. **[6]**

DANNII LEIVERS

BURY THE KINGS

V

SELF-RELEASED

The Aussie bruisers' latest concept EP is centred around grief with pummelling opener *Stage One – You're Gone* sounding like early Vision Of Disorder and the other four stages explored emotionally with frenetic vicious screams, and bruising percussion mixed with djent overtones. **[7]**

CRAIG HUNTLEY

HEX
H E X
HUMMUS

Atmospheric, industrial soundscapes from repurposed Swiss crew

If the word 'supergroup' causes your nose to bleed and the left side of your body to go numb, that's fine [it's not; see a doctor immediately – Ed]. But for every Travelling Wilburys there's a H E X. Based in Geneva, and formed of current and former members of Equus, Commodore, Kassette and notable Swiss post-rock troupe Shora, *H E X* is going to scratch an itch for anyone who's bewildered by Author & Punisher but repelled by the neon cheese of Perturbator or Carpenter Brut. From the claustrophobic, industrial clangour of opener *Metaheaven*, through the ridged, synth-lead repetitive pulse of *Process* – which sounds like an eerie, 8-bit reconstruction of *Surface To Air*-era Zombi – and culminating with the digitally symphonic might of the *Terminator*-soundtrack-esque closer *Highrise*, if you've ever wondered what John Carpenter covering Spacemen 3 would sound like, this is for you. **7**

FOR FANS OF: John Carpenter, Zombi, Laibach

TOBY COOK

KALMAH
Palo
SPINEFARM

Heroic return from unheralded Finnish melodeath marauders

Despite being overshadowed by some of their more showy or ridiculous countrymen, Finland's Kalmah have been arguably the most consistent of the melodeath field, finding their niche yet always finding something new to bring to the table. Their eighth effort sees the distillation of their steady journey but tapering back on the more savage black metalisms of last effort, *Seventh Swamphony*. Opener *Blood Ran Cold* sets the triumphant tone, imbued with a Celtic strain akin to a warrior charging into massed ranks of raging leprechauns, and while there are many tracks that follow the folk-tinged formula, at its best *Palo* is still an exhilarating gallop. *Take Me Away*'s resplendent guitar has live ballad written all over it and *Paystreak* tries to shift away from the standard tempo, while the jig and shimmering keys of *The World Of Rage* plants the band's flag firmly in the conquered ground. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Wintersun, Ensiferum, Children Of Bodom

ADAM REES

KAMELOT
The Shadow Theory
NAPALM

Floridian power metal troupe get cerebral with an ambitious concept

Kamelot are no strangers to concept albums, but the idea behind their latest is ambitious even by their standards. In Jungian psychology, the shadow refers to the dark side of our unconsciousness and the quintet have expanded this into a full-blown theme that explores the complexity of the human mind. It sounds like the plot to some weird arthouse movie, and *The Shadow Theory* is so epic it *could* be a film soundtrack. Jam-packed with monstrous riffs, strings, choirs, stunning guest vocals from Beyond The Black's Jennifer Haben and gut-wrenching growls from Once Human's Lauren Hart, it captures the perfect balance between darkness and light. Singer Tommy Karevik is more expressive than ever, and even seems to be channelling the theatrical airs of his fellow Ayreon collaborator Damian Wilson (ex-Threshold). *The Shadow Theory* isn't just big, it's clever, too! **8**

FOR FANS OF: Ayreon, Epica, Sabaton

NATASHA SCHARF

KATAKLYSM
Meditations
NUCLEAR BLAST

Canada's dogged melodeath deviants click into a new groove

Poster boys for death metal persistence, Kataklysm have never achieved the notoriety that their relentless onward march should have delivered by now. Part of the problem is that the Canadians have never conformed to standard notions of how death metal should sound. On *Meditations*, an obvious debt to 90s groove metal and post-Fear Factory precision places them midway between underground extremity and a more mainstream-friendly approach. In truth, it's a fervently modern hybrid that suits them and which they have been tinkering with since the early 00s with varying levels of success. Here, they have nailed it. Brutish opener *Guillotine* and the insanely catchy *Outsider* set the tone, all stripped-down riffing and hammering kicks, before the album blossoms into a thrilling frenzy of hyper-precise tech-thrash anthems topped with refined melodeath melancholy. The band's 13th album deserves to be a lucky one. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Decapitated, Machine Head, Sepultura

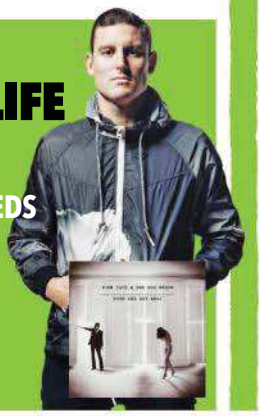
DOM LAWSON

ALBUM THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

WINSTON McCALL
Parkway Drive

NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS
Push The Sky Away

"This album took me to a place I couldn't return from. To create something that is so immersive and complete that it completely consumes the listener is a feat I never thought was possible. *Push The Sky Away* set the benchmark for me."



The Korn frontman takes us on a trip back in time

JONATHAN DAVIS
Black Labyrinth
SUMERIAN

Korn frontman brings his 80s past into new pastures

HE MIGHT BE 'the godfather of nu metal' but Jonathan Davis has never shied away from his love of early-80s new romantic and post-punk bands. He's also been keen to step outside of the boundaries of his day job to do everything from compose film scores to DJ dubstep over the years, so if there is any surprise in *Black Labyrinth*, it's not that it exists, but that it has taken this long to arrive.

From the opening guitar lick of first track *Underneath My Skin*, which sounds more like Altered Images than anything remotely metal, it's clear this is a real labour of love for Jonathan. Taking the darkly gothic and electronic elements of the music of his youth and adding his penchant for lyrical honesty, at various points the album details everything from mental health issues to battling against a dependency on prescribed drugs. It's certainly a disorientating first listen. It is worth noting that, much like many of his contemporaries, the plush modern production techniques employed here mean that *Black Labyrinth* doesn't ever sound completely like an 80s jukebox, but when Jonathan does get that perfect The Cure guitar tone on *Medicate* or the opening few minutes of *Please Tell Me* sounding like a cover of Duran Duran's *The Chauffeur*, that's when the album really soars. It's not perfect; *Basic Needs*' Eastern soundscape is fine but tests the patience at over six minutes, and when Jonathan sings *'Can I wear your skin?'* on the Siouxsie And The Banshees-esque chime of *Gender* it gets a bit awkward. Ultimately, though, Jonathan Davis has such a distinctive tone it can only be one man, making this comparable to a modern version of Public Image Limited, where John Lydon's personality was stamped large over an unrecognisable musical canvas. An oddity for Korn fans, possibly, but there's much to admire here. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Public Image Limited, The Black Queen, Gary Numan

STEPHEN HILL

Graveyard refuse to sit on their laurels

GRAVEYARD

Peace

NUCLEAR BLAST

Gothenburg's celebrated retro-rockers come back swinging

SWEDEN'S CROWN PRINCES of swinging retro cool announced their split in September 2016, one year after releasing their quirky, soul-infused fourth album, *Innocence & Decadence*. The news came as quite a surprise, as this hotly touted quartet's sole raison d'être always seemed to be a simple, overriding passion for playing honest, righteous, gut-level rock'n'roll. They were still bringing new twists and influences to bear on their sound, while their fanbase was continuing to grow thanks to many high-profile support slots, festivals and headline tours. Only a scanty handful of naive souls could have imagined that Graveyard were seriously gone for good, but even fewer imagined that this dissolution would barely last four months – not so much a hiatus, more a mini-break, the band coming across as a little bit histrionic and indecisive. Whatever their reasons – the drummer's changed, if anyone was likely to notice – it's lent an additional sense of urgency and jubilation to this comeback LP's aptly titled shit-kicking opener, *It Ain't Over Yet*, instantly impressing with an improved production that emphasises directness, looseness, warmth and humanity. And although the heavier numbers like *Cold Love, Please Don't* and *Walk On* have a strutting-cock swagger that's plugged straight into the rarefied magic of early 70s hard rock heroism, Graveyard are equally adept at the moments of hushed vulnerability. The mellow atmospheres of more sensitive cuts like the Jeff Buckley-ish *See The Day*, the brooding, nocturnal *Del Manic*, *The Fox*'s earthy flirtation with Nirvana's *About A Girl* and the emotive singer-songwriter shades of *Bird Of Paradise* are so finely wrought you can't help hoping that one day Graveyard apply themselves to delivering their Led Zep *III* – although, hopefully, not after any more premature, fleeting disbandments.

8

FOR FANS OF: **Led Zeppelin, Witchcraft, Clutch**

CHRIS CHANTLER

LIMB

Saboteurs Of The Sun

NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

London's stoner rockers lurch into new sonic territory

On their third album, London quartet Limb are, by their own reckoning, expanding their horizons, introducing elements of industrial, goth and even krautrock to their stoner assault. Rather than overhaul their spilled-beer-and-torn-jeans riff factory, they've merely finetuned the production line. With the exception of the synth-drenched, drum-free closer, *100 Years*, these experiments don't ostentatiously take over, but subtly augment the rock'n'roll mayhem around them. Witness the psychedelia of *Rising Tides*' guitar solo, or the bass-driven atmospherics of *Survival Knife* and *Astronaut*. In fact, bassist Sam Cooper shines throughout thanks to a sterling production job by Russ Russell, somehow creating both space and claustrophobia in equal measure. The whole enterprise is shot through with a punk rock sensibility courtesy of Rob Hoey's gruff voice, without ever forgetting that Limb are all about hulking great riffs. *Saboteurs Of The Sun* won't change the world, but it will make you bang your head *really* hard.

7

FOR FANS OF: **Clutch, Down, Thrice**

ROB BARBOUR

LORDI

Sexorcism

AFM

Finland's schlock rockers make a tone-deaf return

For an album released in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement, Lordi's ninth album, *Sexorcism*, isn't only treading contentious ground, it's downright irresponsible. The cover depicts a demonic female in provocative schoolgirl dress, wrists tied to a chair with her knickers round her ankles while the songs are awash with cum jokes and lines about our protagonist *'on all fours, begging'*. *'Got you naked in my cellar, never gonna let you leave,'* rejoices Mr Lordi to the catchy hard rock disco stomp, then the band chant *'The beast is yet to cum'* before revealing that she's *'just on the edge of 16'*. That Lordi are on fire musically doesn't excuse the unappetising insinuation of constraint and sexual objectification. It's too close to the bone, which, knowing Lordi, will probably be their next album title.

5

FOR FANS OF: **GWAR, Sabaton, Steel Panther**

HOLLY WRIGHT

MASK OF JUDAS

The Mesmerist

SELF-RELEASED

Tech-death debutants deliver an uncomfortably crammed first impression

In modern prog metal, the key to success is fine honing, Gojira's *Magma* and Mastodon's *Emperor Of Sand* being cases in point. Mask Of Judas's *The Mesmerist*, meanwhile, is the polar opposite, throwing so much at the wall with such rapid-fire impetuousness that it becomes psychologically exhausting. The album is ceaseless, but not in a fun and succinct way like *Reign in Blood*; every song wants to be a thrashing yet melodic mixture of Sikth, Meshuggah, Arch Enemy and Architects, but unfortunately just ends up sounding unfocused and unmemorable. It's a damn shame, too, as there is a ton of promise here. The instrumental performances are as mathematically complex as a calculus exam and vocalist Jo Challen's cleans are nothing less than angelic. They just need more discretion and discipline to complement all of this impressive talent.

5

FOR FANS OF: **Next to None, Periphery, Arch Enemy**

MATT MILLS

SMALL MERCIES

THE NEW BLOOD

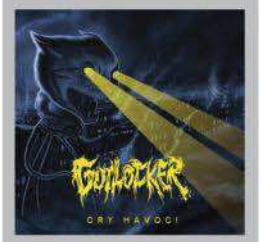
CASKET FEEDER

Scalps

HIBERNACULA

It's not a new trick: mixing seething, vein-popping hardcore with Entombed's rusty chainsaw guitar tone. But holy shit, can the results be a thing of extreme crushing brutality! The five tracks here can't become a full-length quickly enough. **[8]**

STEPHEN HILL



GUTLOCKER

Cry Havoc!

SELF-RELEASED

On *Cry Havoc!* these Woking nutjobs offer a 'Welcome To Fucktown' that appears to be an angry locale, hospitable to the crawling, industrialised sludge of Bay Area geezers, Skinlab and the pissing of refinement down fetid drains. **[6]**

CONNIE GORDON

SPARROW

Digital People

SELF-RELEASED

Aussie pop-punkers I, Said The Sparrow have reinvented themselves as a modern-day Static-X. This five-track has all the right industrial metal references and some promising tunes. Could we be looking at the new face of industrial metal? **[6]**

NATASHA SCHARF

MASTER BOOT RECORD

Direct Memory Access

BLOOD MUSIC

Digital delirium from the heavier end of synthwave spectrum

The synthwave movement that's currently in the process of sweeping the metal underground, and threatening to go overground, is simultaneously one of the most exciting and shocking things to have happened under the umbrella of heavy music for some time. If you've yet to be seduced by the throbbing darkness of Carpenter Brut or Perturbator because it just... well... isn't heavy enough for you, then Master Boot Record might well be the band for you. Featuring much of the mechanical 80s chrome synth so beloved of those acts, MBR have a much more obvious connection to the guitar and a guttural, almost operatic doom vocal that recalls the darkest recesses of pagan metal. It's certainly less instant than Perturbator and less fun than Carpenter Brut, but Master Boot Record are another name to add to the ever-swelling list of acts expanding our world into new areas. **7**

FOR FANS OF: **Gost, Perturbator, Carpenter Brut**

STEPHEN HILL

MICAWBER

Beyond The Reach Of Flame

PROSTHETIC

Sharpened Green Bay death/thrashers fail to leave a mark

After two self-released full-lengths, Micawber finally get the chance to go into the studio with a bit of label clout behind them to give their technical thrashing death metal attack the beef it deserves. *Beyond The Reach Of Flame* hits the spot that Micawber were aiming for, and hard, too. Opener *Full Denim Jacket* thrashes and stomps in a hugely satisfying way, and some of the riffs throughout sting more than vinegar on an open sore, particularly the whiplash-inducing, vicious sprint of *Icon Of Extinction*. But, even in the brief 38-minute running time, there's a distinct lack of memorable songs. Even after a decade in the game you feel that Micawber still need a bit of work on their craft before they can make the cohesive album that their talents suggest they're capable of. **6**

FOR FANS OF: **Psycroptic, The Faceless, Suffocation**

STEPHEN HILL

MIDNATTSOL

The Aftermath

NAPALM

Norway's symphonic metallers get their sister act together

A lot has happened in the seven years since Midnattsol's last album, *The Metamorphosis Melody*. Most notably, much-loved, ex-Leaves' Eyes/Theatre Of Tragedy chanteuse Liv Kristine has joined her sister Carmen Elise Espenæs on vocals. Her presence has lifted the band into something that, with a bit more time, could become pretty special. Although the Norwegian metallers have been classified as symphonic folk, they've never really gone all out on the histrionics. *The Aftermath* focuses on the band's gothic and Nordic folk influences, allowing space for the sisters' haunting vocal symbiosis to take hold on earthy and subtly atmospheric songs like *Herr Mannelig* and *Vem Kan Segla*. Not everything hits the spot – *The Unveiled Truth* is especially unremarkable – but if Midnattsol weren't already on the radar of Within Temptation and Amberian Dawn fans, they certainly will be now. **6**

FOR FANS OF: **Within Temptation, Amberian Dawn, Leaves' Eyes**

DANNII LEIVERS

NOISEPICKER

Peace Off

EXILE ON MAINSTREAM

Unsung fuzz rock maverick gets a blues boner

Wonkiness is an underrated virtue in heavy music and Harry Armstrong has long been one of its most reliable exponents. Noisepicker are a dirtier, bluesier and marginally less spiky affair than Harry's works with Hangnail and End Of Level Boss, but his knack for penning riffs that rival the classic ones they salute remains undiminished. The slower moments are the most memorable; whether gnashing and wailing like a bonged-out Percy Plant on the pendulous, proto-metal heft of *A Taste Of My Dying* or grimacing amid a fog of distortion on *He Knew It Would All End In Tears*, it's as if the lovechild of Glenn Danzig and Tom Waits has been overdosing on Groundhogs albums, homebrew and peyote. Meanwhile, *I Hear You Talking And It Sounds Like Bullshit To Me* may just be the ultimate (if possibly accidental) anthem for the social media era. **7**

FOR FANS OF: **Kyuss, Danzig, Alabama Thunderpussy**

DOM LAWSON

LAST ALBUM BOUGHT

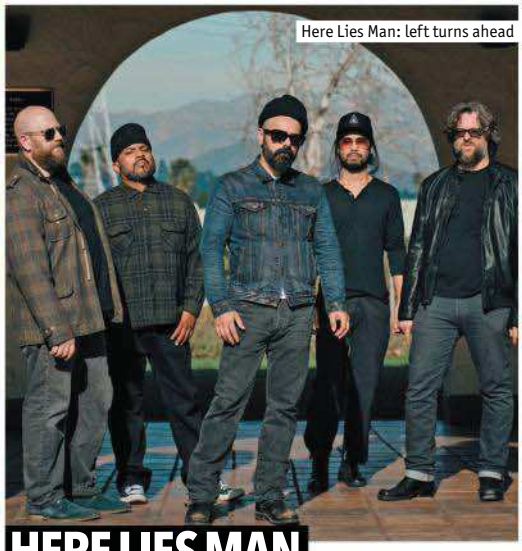
DARK VADER

Galactic Empire

RIVERS OF NIHIL

Where Owls Know My Name

"This death metal band's latest effort is one of the more impressive albums to cross my radar as of late. Gloom, anger and raw emotion radiate from it; a few things I am quite familiar with. My only criticism, given the title, is the lack of owl sounds. Bit misleading, that one."



Here Lies Man: left turns ahead

HERE LIES MAN

You Will Know Nothing

RIDINGEASY

NYC's Afro-Sabbath groove wizards expand their vision

IN AN ERA where metal mash-ups of Marvin Gaye and Bee Gees classics command millions of hits on YouTube, Here Lies Man's 2017 self-titled full-length debut found an open-minded and eager audience for its resinous hybrid of Black Sabbath-meets-afrobeat. Comprised of members of New York City's Antibalas, Here Lies Man summoned a mesmerising soundscape of Nigerian afrobeat grooves and thudding primal rhythms on which they layered scuzzy, Iommi-inspired riffs and spiralling psychedelic melodies. The weirdness of the concept – two seemingly unrelated genres fused together – distracted from just how good it sounded, which should have surprised nobody because at the root of both styles is a deep rhythmic reverence to blues and R&B, yet the debut still felt both subtly innovative and fresh. On their latest outing, the groove technicians dial back the Sabbath worship a bit, which actually marks an evolutionary step forward for the sound. Riffs no longer dominate but rather play recurring roles throughout the tracks. Opening with the headbanging proto-metal squall of *Animal Noises, You Will Know Nothing* dissipates and expands into an ethereal psychedelic voyage, with tracks like *Floating On Water* and *You Ought To Know* playing out on the spacey side and *Taking The Blame* and *Summon Fire* balancing things at the other end of the spectrum. The essence of each track is its own driving, percussive rhythm, which is the heartbeat of all psychedelia. That said, a common pitfall of psych music is its susceptibility to indulgent, generic jamming, which you'll find here in modest doses. Co-founded by guitarist Marcos Garcia and drummer Geoff Mann, the tracks rely on progressively slower tempos that correspond to an Afro-Cuban rhythmic formula known as the clave. Google it. But this record isn't about counting beats or mathematical equations – this is an interesting rhythmic concept teased out in some genuinely fascinating directions. Well worth a listen – preferably through headphones. **7**

FOR FANS OF: **Mr Bungle, Goat, Goatess**

JOE DALY

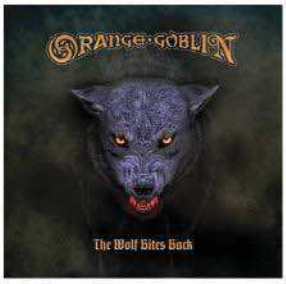
Orange Goblin have made another fists-in-the-air corker

ORANGE GOBLIN

The Wolf Bites Back

CANDLELIGHT/UNIVERSAL

London's raucous rock outlaws shift their axis



TWENTY THREE YEARS is a lifetime in rock'n'roll, and those years have sometimes hung heavily on Orange Goblin. There have been moments where you got the sense that the struggle of being an underground metal band was grinding them down. Not any more. The Londoners' ninth album sounds like the work of a band drunk on life. It's a bolshie, belligerent, bear of an album whose in-yer-face front hides a street-smart intellect.

Like every Orange Goblin album, *The Wolf Bites Back*'s heart is in the past, though this time they're moving beyond the usual Sabbath/Motörhead axis without completely throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The likes of air-punching rumble-in-a-biker-bar anthem *Sons Of Salem* and lovingly raucous Lemmy tribute *Renegade* are offset by flashes of brilliant strangeness: the spiralling instrumental, denim-clad psychedelia of *In Bocca Al Lupo*, the low-slung beginning and phased ending of *Ghosts Of The Primitive*, the desert-dry country-blues doom of *The Stranger*, in which a husky-voiced Ben Ward sounds virtually unrecognisable. It's not reinventing the wheel so much as bashing into a slightly different, yet still fundamentally wheel-like shape.

It's not clear what's changed. Ben Ward has cited the likes of The Stooges, early-70s psych rockers Captain Beyond and, most interesting, German avant-gardists Can as influences. The presence of the latter is barely detectable anywhere on the album musically, let alone the beery hardcore-leaning eruption of *Suicide Division*, but Orange Goblin have taken on the krautrockers' experimental MO and used it to slowly but perceptively dismantle their own boundaries.

Even if they hadn't consistently made great records, you have to applaud Orange Goblin for the fact that their outlaw spirit has seen them overcome the obstacles that have threatened to derail them. *'Form an orderly queue for the grave'* growls Ben on the flagons-aloft rabble-rouser *Burn The Ships*. On this showing, his band are a long way from the end of the road.

8

FOR FANS OF: Motörhead, Down, Captain Beyond

DAVE EVERLEY

SECTIONED

Annihilated

SELF-RELEASED

Frenzied Frontierer members bring the maths and the muck

This is gloriously filthy, meticulously crafted, convention-defying hardcore. Comprising four-fifths of Edinburgh's (also brilliant) Frontierer, Sectioned take that band's mathcore mentality and stab its kidney with a snotty shiv made of punk. *Annihilated*'s 13 tracks all roll with sphincter-tightening ferocity, the time-signatures flailing, feedback-bellowing, Kurt Ballou-esque production choking any love, any compassion that might have slipped through. Glitchy electronics are utilised best on the tech-metal masterpiece *Portrait*, but in no way like The Dillinger Escape Plan. Nah. Rather than melodically entice, electronics are deployed to distract, to misinform, to give you the fucking willies. Everything about *Annihilated* is intense, the rare quiet patches just feeding the tension. And while not as obviously 'hooky' as bands like The Armed and Converge, Sectioned do have earworms – they're just harder to catch. An uncompromisingly defiant debut album. Nappies recommended.

8

FOR FANS OF: The Armed, The Dillinger Escape Plan, Will Haven

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

SHINEDOWN

Attention Attention

ATLANTIC

US arena rockers bring the bombast... and the belly laughs

At times invigorating and at others unintentionally side-splitting, *Attention Attention* is loveable rock'n'roll lunacy that does nothing but provide pure entertainment. Shinedown's sixth album displays them at their most uninhibited, standing strongest when it witnesses them border on metal territory with *Devil, Evolve* and *Brilliant*. The anthems' bouncing energy already feels destined to ignite live crowds. However, the real moments that make this disc a standout are its hilarity-inducing head-scratchers: capsules of magnificence like *Black Soul*, which has a keyboard riff weirdly reminiscent of *We Are Number One*. Or the choice to commence *Kill Your Conscience* with Brent Smith emotively humming the words *'Beast mode'*. Or *Special*'s inexplicable ending, boasting an impromptu round of half-assed, bodiless applause. Shinedown fully commit to the crazy with this release and the end result is constant, unadulterated and silly fun.

7

FOR FANS OF: Three Days Grace, Stone Sour, Disturbed

MATT MILLS

SPLIT CRANIUM

I'm The Devil And I'm Ok

IPECAC

US and Finnish A-Listers dial up a crust/krautrock conundrum

Every time Al Gore looks at his creation – a little thing called 'the internet' – and considers how it has devolved into a haven for Snapchat filters and illicit privacy breaches, he must weep. Buck up, Al, there are people putting it to good use! Those include Aaron Turner, Faith Coloccia, Nate Newton, Tomi Leppänen and Jussi Lehtisalo – names you might recognise from Converge, Isis, Circle, Mammifer and more. Split Cranium utilise technology to bridge the distance between America and Finland in the creation of adventurous hardcore punk that forcefeeds krautrock-styled keyboards into d-beat powered punk. The infectious, melodic riffs, overlaid guitars and barrel-chested vocals are further accented by atmospheric, spacey soundtrack washes in the cultural collision of controlled crust-core and slashing noise that at once provides a sonic energising and restores faith in the productive capacities of the human-technology dyad.

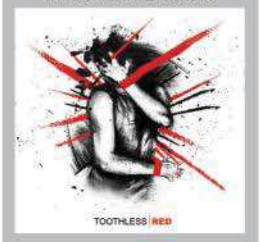
8

FOR FANS OF: Disfear, Tau Cross, Anti-Cimex

CONNIE GORDON

SMALL MERCIES

THE NEW BLOOD



TOOTHLESS

Red

SELF-RELEASED

This distinctive six-track packs in a lot of ferocity, creativity, and groove into a short amount of time. The Pennsylvania metalcore quintet know how to mesh killer vocals, exciting fretwork, and playful use of tempo to build tension. **[8]**

NIK YOUNG

VAMPILLIA

Happiness Brought By Endless Sorrow

TEMPLE OF TORTUROUS

In less than eight minutes, the bonkers noisefuckers Vampillia cram in more genres than most festival line-ups can manage. A mash of grind, noise, post, industrial, glitch and whatever else create a hyperactive canvas of chaos. **[6]**

LUKE MORTON

ZERO THEOREM

Ataraxis EP

SHIMSHAM

'Ataraxis' is a posh word for a feeling of calm, which is exactly what this soaring prog-metal opus is sure to inspire. Huge, unifying choruses and perfectly executed chug-athon breakdowns make it an impressive first release. **[7]**

TOM CONNICK

THORIUM
Blasphemy Awakes
MIGHTY MUSIC

Rare outing from Danish death metal merchants

Specialising in the filthy, HM-2-pedal-heavy death metal of their neighbours across the border in Stockholm, Thorium's career has been somewhat barren, with *Blasphemy Awakes* being only their fourth album in 20 years. While being gloriously rough around the edges and revelling in the ugliness of *Whispers From The Grave* and Satanic clichés of the gurgling *Slow Deep And Dead*, Thorium maintain a melodic undercurrent that nods to Sweden's other extreme scene, with the twin leads of the title track and *Tengil* peaking through the avalanche of guttural vocals and riffs. *Maniac* lives up to its title with a vicious final salvo of rhythmic barbarity from the well-travelled Perra Karlsson and bassist KB Larsen, who's managed to find time to record the album away from his day job in Volbeat, while vocalist MHA covers all manner of grotesque characters to complement the nightmarish surroundings. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Bloodbath, Dismember, Unleashed

ADAM REES

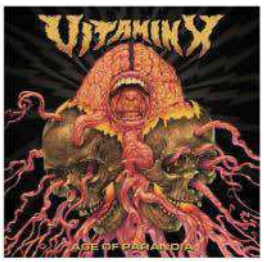
TREMONTI
A Dying Machine
NAPALM

Alter Bridge axeman diverts from a tried and true formula

On his three prior and lauded solo albums, succinctness has been Mark Tremonti's primary ally. Each entry in his triumvirate clocks in at 45 minutes, delivers a massive punch of riffing, soul and melody, and then stops as suddenly and violently as it began. With disc number four, though, Mark has adopted a far more grandiose approach: not only does *A Dying Machine* boast over an hour of music, but it's also a narrative-driven, conceptual piece. And while that approach succeeds in evolving Tremonti's diversity and lyricism, it does, however, also remove some of the impactful energy that made his past material excel. Mightily metallic high-points like *Bringer Of War, Make It Hurt* and *The Day When Legions Burned* make *A Dying Machine* more than worth the cost of admission, but the entire affair does feel slightly bloated after repeat listens. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Prong, Alter Bridge, Seether

MATT MILLS



VITAMIN X
Age Of Paranoia
SOUTHERN LORD

Dutch straight-edge crew keep it short, fast and furious

The sixth full-length album from these seasoned Amsterdam-based straight-edge hardcore punks proves that they've still got it, even some 20 years on. *Age Of Paranoia* jams 16 very solid tracks into 28 exhilarating minutes and features guest guitar solos from J. Mascis (Dinosaur Jr., Witch) and Bubba Dupree (Soundgarden, Void) along the way. Newly signed to Southern Lord, this is technically the band's first big label release, but the DIY spirit and thrashy rock'n'roll is not lost. From start to finish, the pace is fast and the groove strong, and Marc Emmerik's fretwork is wild and elating. *Rollercoaster Ride* and *Speak No Evil* prove particularly pleasing, but most songs are quickly addictive and memorable with early 80s hardcore punk angst, 1970s rock riffs, and singalong gang vocals. Yet another credible and catchy delivery that should translate well live. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Minor Threat, Cro-Mags, Good Clean Fun

NIK YOUNG

THE WORD ALIVE
Violent Noise
FEARLESS

Phoenix's metalcore troupe get themselves some identity issues

This is The Word Alive's first release as a trio under Fearless Records, albeit with only two of the founding members remaining, reinforcing the notion of a constantly shapeshifting line-up. Producer Matt Helm (Asking Alexandria, From First To Last) is back at the helm at the behest of the Arizona natives and production is slicker than abrasive predecessor 2016's *Dark Matter*; arena-ready opener *Red Clouds* and ode to *That's The Spirit*-era BMTH *War Is Evermore* beg for radio play while brooding and memorable *Why Am I Like This*, weaves melodic passages underpinned by ephemeral synths. Heavier bursts emerge midway through the album courtesy of *Stare At The Sun*'s vitriolic clatter as well as the cathartic belligerence and throat-ripping vocals surging through riff-centric *My Enemy*, but ultimately such sonic disparity forces TWA into a no-man's land, straddling the shaky ground between metalcore and mainstream alt-rock. **5**

FOR FANS OF: Asking Alexandria, blessthefall, Of Mice & Men

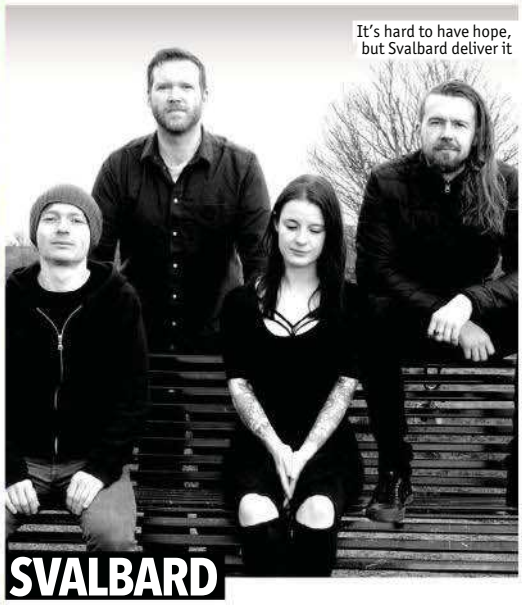
SOPHIE MAUGHAN

FAVOURITE ALBUM ART

ARJEN LUCASSEN
Ayreon

LED ZEPPELIN
Houses Of The Holy

"My favourite artists are Hipgnosis and Roger Dean, hard to pick! I'm going for Led Zeppelin's *Houses Of The Holy*. It's not my favourite Zeppelin album, but the mysterious and colourful artwork is amazing. And all of that before PCs and Photoshop!"



It's hard to have hope, but Svalbard deliver it

SVALBARD
It's Hard To Have Hope
HOLY ROAR

Cathartic and crushing dispatches from the fissures of modern life

IT'S BEEN THREE years since Svalbard's debut album and boy, is it good to have them back. Their previous record, *One Day All This Will End*, was a deliciously aggressive meld of extreme metal and hardcore, and their follow-up is just as destructive. There is no sheen, no polish – everything here is a visceral, honest outpouring of emotion, screaming straight from the heart of vocalist Serena Cherry. Starting with the absurdity of the unpaid internship market, each track tackles topics that affect the youth of today, from revenge porn to the ignorance of using the term 'Feminazi' – two phrases that have only recently become part of the cultural lexicon, but weigh heavy on Svalbard. This is not sloganeering, you can hear the passion bursting out of Serena, rekindling the spirit of punk with a message of truth.

Musically, Svalbard are exploring the more expansive avenues within the realm of black metal. While the frantic, snare-battering and uncontrollable aggression forms the backbone of *It's Hard To Have Hope*, the Bristol four-piece have become masters of the build, allowing the music to expand and blossom into something more. Only one track is under the four-minute mark, giving the heaviness room to breathe and divert itself down shadowy alleys, creating cascading melodies like a waterfall of darkness. Backed by the throat-shredding vocals, oozing with a searing honesty rarely found in contemporary metal, layers of despair surround the pitch black abyss – it's the sound of humanity circling the drain and one band's reaction to it. Because Svalbard are just one band, with one voice, but they're using it. They're standing up for what they believe in, standing against all the bullshit that young people – particularly women – are facing in 2018. This isn't your standard metal record; this album means something, and while focusing on the negatives of society, it offers a message of hope – something severely lacking right now. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Oathbreaker, Conjurer, Employed To Serve

LUKE MORTON

WRECK YOUR NECK!

OVERKILL

LIVE IN ~~OVER~~HAUSEN

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SUNDAY 6 MAY	READING – FACEBAR
FRIDAY 11 MAY	GLASGOW – IVORY BLACKS
FRIDAY 11 MAY	BELFAST – BAR SUB
SATURDAY 12 MAY	DUBLIN – FIBBER MAGEES
SATURDAY 19 MAY	CARLISLE – THE BRICKYARD
THURSDAY 24 MAY	NORWICH – BRICKMAKERS
SATURDAY 26 MAY	LEICESTER – DE MONTFORT HALL
SATURDAY 26 MAY	MILTON KEYNES – CRAUFORD ARMS
FRIDAY 1 JUNE	STOKE – THE UNDERGROUND
FRIDAY 1 JUNE	HITCHIN – CLUB 85
SATURDAY 2 JUNE	NORWAY – TRIBUTE
SATURDAY 2 JUNE	BURNLEY – SANCTUARY
SATURDAY 9 JUNE	POLAND – RUDE BOY CLUB
FRIDAY 15 JUNE	WREXHAM – REWIND
FRIDAY 15 JUNE	SALTASH – LIVE WIRE
SATURDAY 16 JUNE	CARDIFF – FUEL
SATURDAY 16 JUNE	SOMERSET – BRIDGWATER TOWN HALL
SATURDAY 23 JUNE	NEWCASTLE – TRILLIANS
SATURDAY 23 JUNE	NOTTINGHAM – MAZE
SATURDAY 23 JUNE	MERSEYSIDE – EBGB'S
SUNDAY 24 JUNE	MANCHESTER – REBELLION
FRIDAY 29 JUNE	OXFORD – BULLINGDON
SATURDAY 30 JUNE	LINCOLNSHIRE – CAFÉ INDIEPENDANT
SATURDAY 30 JUNE	NORTHANTS – PRINCE OF WALES
THURSDAY 5 JULY	PETERBOROUGH – MET LOUNGE
SATURDAY 7 JULY	LONDON – THE DOME
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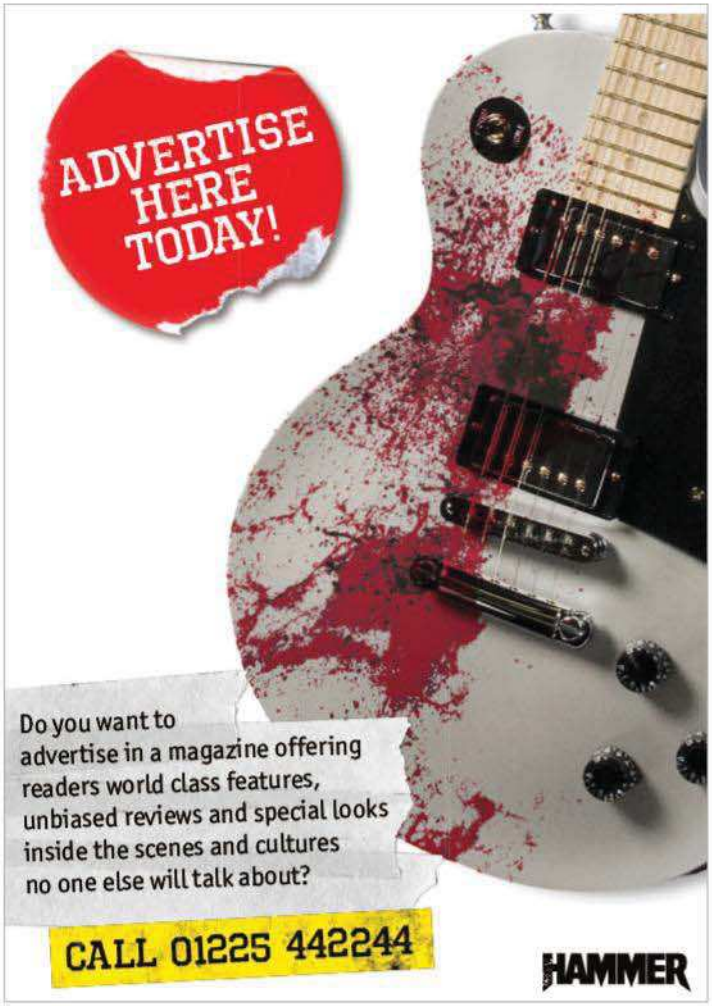

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SUN 27 MAY
ROSETTA
+ OHHMS, MAUDLIN, AND MANTIS
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MON 28 MAY
JANET GARDNER (VIXEN)
+ SISTER SHOTGUN
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MON 4 JUNE
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+ BLACK SKIES BURN
+ CASKER FEEDER AND PROFANITY
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H2O – 10 YEARS NOTHING TO PROVE
+ ALL FOR NOTHING
+ ON A KIDDING TO NOTHING
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THUR 28 JUNE
MODERN LIFE IS WAR
+ SVALBARD, SWAIN AND WHO CARES?
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FRI 29 JUNE
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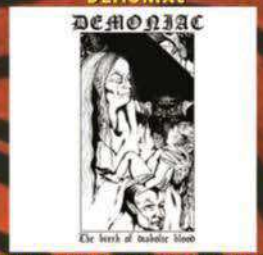

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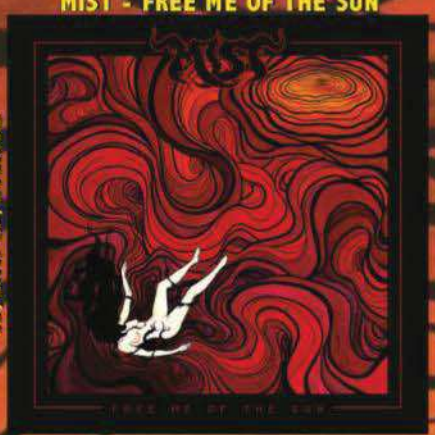

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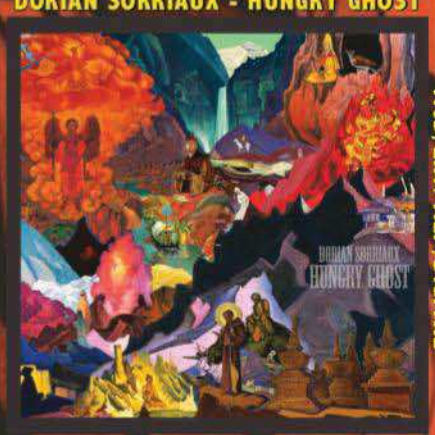

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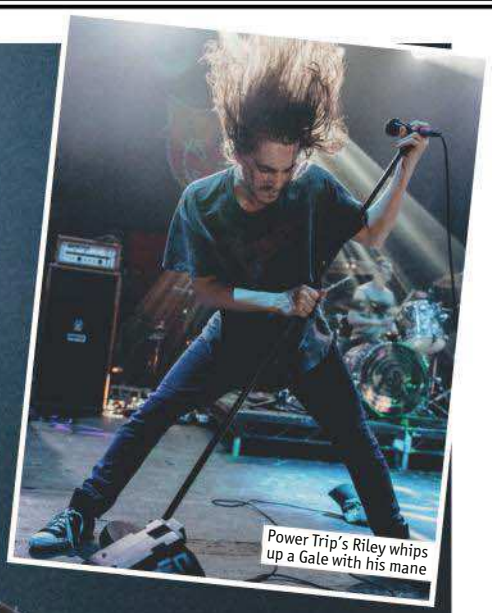
Upstaged by the young support acts? Nah, Matt Heafy's got 'em licked



Power Trip's Riley whips up a Gale with his mane

TRIVIUM

CODE ORANGE/POWER TRIP/ VENOM PRISON

BRIXTON ACADEMY, LONDON

SETLIST

The Sin And The Sentence
Throes Of Perdition
Betrayer
Ascendancy
Sever The Hand
Inception Of The End
Until The World Goes Cold
Becoming The Dragon
Thrown Into The Fire
Like Light To The Flies
Drowned And Torn
Asunder
The Heart From Your Hate
Beyond Oblivion

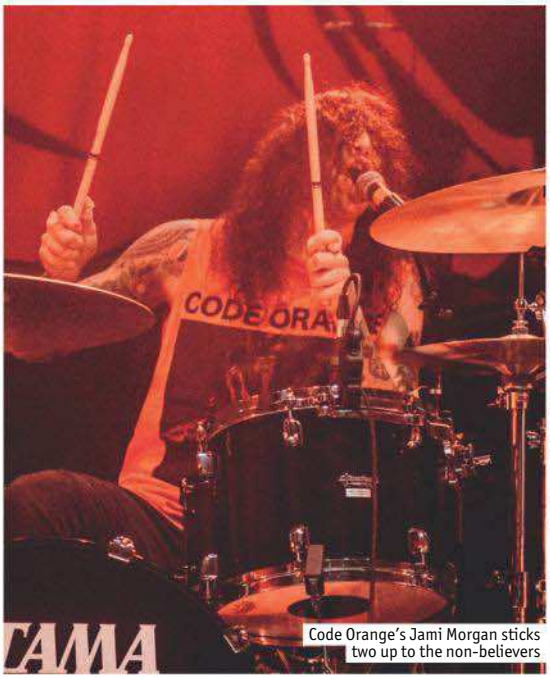
ENCORE

Shattering The Skies Above
Pull Harder On The Strings Of Your Martyr
In Waves

Venom Prison's Larissa bends over backwards to woo the crowd

Code Orange's Reba Meyers crushes the resistance

JAKE OWENS



Code Orange's Jami Morgan sticks two up to the non-believers

Trivium raise an army

Trivium's Corey Beaulieu is caught in his own perfect storm

The 2018 Metal Hammer tour shines a light on a new era of heavy

TRIVIUM TONIGHT ARE A PERFECT STORM

IT'S BEEN A while since *Metal Hammer* has put its name to a tour such as this one, but then it's been a while since a live package represented the eclectic nature of our scene in such a galvanising manner. Crucially, it's also been a while since metal felt like it could really fill a venue of this size with bands who are this young, exciting and challenging. There's something in the air tonight, and while the cynical amongst you might think we're patting ourselves on the back due to our own involvement in proceedings, tonight there is an argument to be had that every band involved fail to put a foot wrong between them.

Need convincing? Well, how about this: at 6.30pm a group of Welsh and Russian punk rock kids walk onstage at one of this country's most prestigious venues, 18 months after dropping their debut album, and proceed to play a set of utterly savage death metal. Within minutes there is a circlepit opening up the floor of Brixton Academy. **VENOM PRISON [8]** have supported some pretty big bands since the release of *Animus*, taking on everyone from Trap Them to Suicide Silence and making them look fairly ordinary in the process, but tonight they transcend all of it. What's all the more impressive is how at home this music sounds on such a grand scale: crushing, suffocating and moving all at once. When they're in the groove like this, VP are feral. An unreal opener.

If you don't believe in love at first sight then you really needed to be here to witness the moment the uninitiated present first hear **POWER TRIP**'s **[9]** guitar tone. The jaws of the curious immediately drop to the floor as the Texan quintet launch into the grinding thrash of *Soul Sacrifice*, which is nothing compared to the reaction to the already anthemic *Executioner's Tax* – so much so that the band are forced to stop for a good five minutes as an audience member is seriously injured in the chaos. Riley Gale pleads for everyone to look out for each other but his words fall on deaf ears as, only two songs later, the band are stopped once again due to an injury. Bodies are being carried out and it's not even 8pm yet! Power Trip do finally get to finish a set that is a perfect amalgam of thrash, groove, death metal, hardcore and genuine danger not seen since Pantera in their pomp. Stunning.

BUT, IF IT'S danger you want, if it's confrontation, if it's a challenge, then **CODE ORANGE [9]** are making all your violent dreams come true. The first ever Grammy-nominated hardcore band have some serious hype to live up to, and are the only band to experience some resistance tonight, but such is their mix of white noise, pounding beatdown riffs, true punk rock spirit, visceral hatred, genuine seething darkness and unpredictability that, even if you despise them, you're too petrified to look away. *Bleeding In The Blur* has become a landmark song, and a signpost to where Code Orange can go next, but the size of the roar of *"MOTHERFUCKER!"* from the Academy floor during *Real* and the sight of a punk rock band channelling the bleak, epic grandeur of Type O Negative and Life Of Agony on *dream2* are the moments that really set spines tingling. Unstoppable.

It's weird to think that **TRIVIUM [10]** are both the headliners and the odd ones out on this tour. The naysayers would have you believe that they have seen their best days and were cannon fodder to a bill of youthful upstarts. But when your back's against the wall is when you see what a band is truly made of, and tonight, armed with their best album in a decade – at least – in *The Sin And The Sentence*, Trivium step up and show everyone just why we have never given up on them. It's the perfect storm of a newly refreshed band determined to rise to the challenge, with a perfectly pitched setlist and with a crowd desperately willing them to succeed. New songs like the crushing riff-storm of *Betrayer* perfectly complement the fist-pumping arena metal of *Until The World Goes Cold,* with Matt Heafy spending the entire gig grinning from ear to ear. As the final juddering riff of *In Waves* threatens to rip Brixton in two, the mayhem gives rise to an atmosphere that is beautiful, joyous and triumphant in ways not seen since Machine Head's Second Coming on *The Blackening*.

Tonight, Trivium take every snide internet commentator's scorn, every critical misstep, every frustrating line-up change and ram it back down the throats of wherever they came from with interest, finally enjoying a moment that tops *that* Download 2005 set in the process. Call us biased if you must, but if you were here you'll know that metal is in the best form it's been in for a long time. This is real, right now.

STEPHEN HILL

Power Trip's Nick Stewart: cowboy from hell

Ozzy Osbourne: a very fine bellow

M. Shadows refuses to get down with the sickness

Bullet For My Valentine: Matt Tuck chills in the Florida sun

WELCOME TO ROCKVILLE 2018

METROPOLITAN PARK, JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

Heavy metal comes to the Sunshine State

FRIDAY

The sun is out and legions of black-clad metallers are busy either slathering themselves in suncream or getting straight on the beers. Welcome To Rockville has come back to Florida, and it ain't here to play.

The first band to draw a crowd today are **BAD WOLVES [6]**. Featuring members of God Forbid, Devildriver and others, the five-piece's cover of Cranberries classic *Zombie* inevitably gets the biggest reception, even though they do a great job playing their own material. Next up are **UNDEROATH [5]**, who play a mix of old and new material, including recent track *Rapture*. Compared to the other bands on the bill today, they aren't as powerful live, but they stick to a solid sound and still attract a devoted audience. **PARKWAY DRIVE [8]** are one of the heavier bands on the Rockville 2018 bill, and for 40 wild minutes, the Aussies never stop moving – and neither do their crowd, who spark up Friday's best pits. **HALESTORM [8]** then arrive onstage, boasting one of rock's best modern vocalists in Lzzy and a spectacular drum solo from brother Arejay. An incredible stage presence is one thing, but it helps that every musician plays each song perfectly, too.

FIVE FINGER DEATH PUNCH [7] are the first of Friday's true big-hitters. Ivan Moody sounds a little weak today compared to previous live performances, but he scores points by coming clean about his alcoholism, to a warm response. He also shows the crowd some love by bringing two young 5FDP fans onstage and handing off his signature bat to a lucky fan in the crowd. What a guy. Meanwhile, Jacksonville gets louder as **ATREYU [8]** and their fans scream into the night on the Metropolitan stage. They play material off of classic albums such as *The Curse*, and of course, what's an Atreyu set without their cover of *You Give Love A Bad Name*?

To truly end the night, though, there's no one better than the Prince Of Darkness himself. **OZZY OSBOURNE [8]** hits the stage with his band, including his reinstated and similarly legendary guitarist, Zakk Wylde. They play though most of Ozzy's best-known singles, with the bassy *No More Tears* and an emotional *Mama I'm Coming Home* being particular highlights, not to mention Black Sabbath classics *War Pigs* and *Paranoid*. The sound is a little off at points, but it doesn't ruin a great set.

SATURDAY

The heaviness immediately kicks in on day two with **AVATAR [7]**. The Swedes have an awesome, theatrical opening, introducing guitarist Jonas 'Kungen' Jarlsby as "the king" sitting on his throne. He shreds opening track *A Statute Of The King* while the crowd headbangs and moshes – and it doesn't let up after that. One of the day's best bands, **SEVENDUST [9]** get the Rockville metal family moshing throughout the whole set, living up to their glory days when playing classic material such as *Shine* and *Denial*. Next up is **ASKING ALEXANDRIA [5]**. The band attract a huge and devoted crowd, but on a bill such as this, they come off a little soft. **BUTCHER BABIES [6]** are impressive today, vocalists Carla Harvey and Heidi Shepherd running onstage and commanding the crowd to act wild from the get-go. **STONE SOUR [7]** also make their mark, with Corey Taylor and

PICS: JEREMY SAFFER/OZZY: ROSS HALFIN/FOO FIGHTERS: STEVE THRASHER

Foo Fighters: Dave Grohl raises the Rockville spirits even higher

The Fever 333 are on a parole

Ivan Moody fails his anatomy test

the boys getting the crowd moving constantly. Even right at the back, there's still crowdsurfing, singing and jumping during the likes of *Through Glass*.

Saturday's headliner is **AVENGED SEVENFOLD [7]**, who plough through a set beset by unfortunate circumstances. Not only does M. Shadows admit that he's sick and almost didn't make it here (he belts out songs regardless), but there's a pause in the show after a crowdsurfer falls and sustains what is later rumoured to be spinal cord damage. Even with those hindrances, A7X put on a show to remember, making their mark with the likes of *Critical Acclaim*, *Bat Country* and *Unholy Confessions*, not to mention some eye-scorching bursts of pyro. Setbacks be damned.

SUNDAY

The final day of Rockville might just boast one of the festival's best ever line-ups. Big riffs conquer today, and the madness starts with **RED FANG [9]**. In the scorching hot afternoon, the Portland stoner metallers says they're happy to be away from their cold home, and their fans are clearly happy to see them too, with moshing breaking out all over the place.

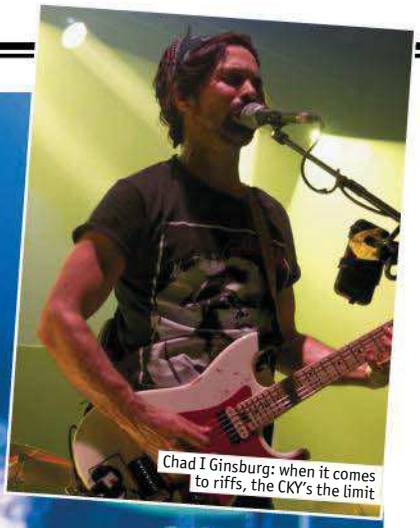
Compared to his Letlive days, you feel Jason Butler could have had a little more stage presence today, but **THE FEVER 333 [6]** go down well regardless, combining a positive message with a diverse sound. **TURNSTILE [8]** may be a young band, but their energy and sheer talent prove they can play alongside legends. You can tell they're already Rockville favourites.

The show continues with **BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE [7]**. Vocalist and guitarist Matthew Tuck admits he's also sick today, but you can barely tell: he sings and screams fan favourites such as *Tears Don't Fall* perfectly. The Welsh heavyweights put on a great show, though it's a little on the short side. A favourite for every music fan who likes it heavy is **CLUTCH [8]**. As soon as the Maryland rockers go onstage, the crowd goes suitably wild, with new song *Gimme The Keys* matching the might of the classics. The party rolls on with **BARONESS [8]**, who remain as vital as ever. Whether it's heavier tracks like *Kerosene* or their more melodic material, such as the gorgeous *Chlorine And Wine*, they're always incredible.

Corey Taylor rifles through Stone Sour's greatest hits

There really is no better way to end a festival than with **FOO FIGHTERS [9]**, and they attract a *massive* crowd – so much so that Dave Grohl keeps mentioning it. And it's a crowd that reacts to every single second their two-hour set, singing, moshing, jumping and crowdsurfing to iconic numbers like *Learn To Fly* and *Everlong*. There are even special guest appearances by Billy Idol, Pat Smear, and, um, John Travolta. It all works, though, and it goes to show that the Foos have become little less than bona fide rock legends. What a show. What a weekend. Until next year, Rockville!

STEPHANIE JENSEN



Chad I Ginsburg: when it comes to riffs, the CKY's the limit

SKINDRED

CKY/DANKO JONES

02 GUILDHALL, SOUTHAMPTON

Skindred don't do subtle... on any level

Newport's raucous ragga-metal outfit lead a partying trifecta

AS DUSK DESCENDS over a rapidly filling Guildhall, Southampton is nearing the end of its hottest day of the year thus far. So, for **DANKO JONES [7]**, the task of working the city's heavy music diehards into a sweat should be an easy one. The trio's sex-drugs-and-rock'n'roll lyrics on cuts like *Sugar Chocolate* and *First Date* are so basic and by-numbers that they make AC/DC look like Tool, but it can't be denied that the band's swagger and charisma make them a truly enticing and fitting warm-up.

CKY [8] are, mercifully, far less prone to cliché, expanding upon Danko Jones's more formulaic rock approach with guitar riffs, melodies and rhythms that far exceed the opening act. Frontman Chad I Ginsburg and bassist Matt Deis make themselves as mobile as possible for their ever-expanding crowd of devotees, while the energy brought forth by the gritty bass and guitars of the popular hit *96 Quite Bitter Beings* is palpable. The set comes to a manic conclusion as the GG Allin cover *Bite It You Scum* brings about the catharsis of this evening's first full-sized moshpit.

With the arrival of the truly unique **SKINDRED [9]**, the entire affair takes a turn, transforming from a rock concert into an unabashed display that transcends genre with the sole intent of providing the best night out possible. That becomes crystal clear as the quartet appear to the sound of a dance remix of the *Star Wars* theme, and then balance out new single *Big Tings* with the electronic stomp of *Stand For Something*. To call Skindred's audience 'fired up' would be a gross understatement, with anthems new and old all being greeted with the same undying enthusiasm and constant movement. Dancing, headbanging, moshing – anything's on the table as Benji Webbe and co craft one of the most inclusive shows in metal. The lead singer's repartee with his fans is as witty as ever, only subsiding with the acoustic lament of *Saying It Now*, which is lovingly dedicated to a deceased friend. The brief, emotional diversion is juxtaposed in the biggest possible way thereafter, as *Kill The Power* causes an invigorating explosion that continues through *Nobody* and a jam-packed encore. Of course, it wouldn't be a Skindred show without *Warning*'s commencement of the iconic Newport Helicopter, the sight of which on such a gigantic scale is destined to send all of Southampton home with big grins plastered across their faces.

MATT MILLS

SETLIST

Big Tings
Stand For Something
Selector
Pressure
Machine
Ninja
Sound The Siren
That's My Jam
Saying It Now (Acoustic)
Kill The Power
Nobody

ENCORE

Roots Rock Riot
Rat Race
Destroy The Dancefloor
Warning

HAVOK

DARKEST HOUR/ CEPHALIC CARNAGE

UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Sounding the klaxon on a triple-threat brawl of US acts, Denver's **CEPHALIC CARNAGE [8]** blend brutality with humorous chatter, vocalist Lenzig Leal speaking confidently – and entertainingly – on marijuana, masturbation and "snack metal" throughout an explosive array of death-grind riff-riots. Though sharp and tightly orchestrated, **DARKEST HOUR**'s **[7]** modern metalcore offering falls comparatively lighter. A sucker-punch cover of The Dead Kennedys' *Nazi Punks Fuck Off* provides a notable exception, stirring enthusiasm before the headline act. Spitting political fuel from the offset, **HAVOK [8]** frontman David Sanchez opens with scream-fest *Hang 'Em High*, igniting a wave of fist-pumping shred fanatics. Amid the lyrical animosity and groovy riffs of *F.P.C.* and *Ingsoc*, the set comes framed with doomsayings of strong anti-political rhetoric. Less 'underlying message' and more 'boot to the face', the Colorado quartet are most definitely on a warpath.

LUKE MILNE

KING GOAT

URNE

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

The sight of people stuffing tissue paper into their ears is a sign that things have gone awry for **URNE [6]**, featuring ex-members of noisemongers Hang The Bastard. Their sludgy mass of savage riffs probably sounds great on a normal day but with the volume cranked to seismic levels they distort into a feral quagmire. Sonic equilibrium is restored for **KING GOAT [8]**, who know that straight-up doom in 2018 is not enough. Showcasing a frisson of dark and epic doomy slabs catapulted to new heights by Trim's pitch-perfect upper range and the subtly Middle Eastern twang of their guitarists, the depth and range of King Goat is a nice package. Forming a foreboding presence under the spotlight, Trim – decked in a thick monk robe – huffs "Do you know how infernally warm it is in this?" while the final vapours of incense dissipate into the warm air to the almighty pummel of *Conduit*. We feel for him but the ceremonious experience they've brought to this Camden bolthole is a refreshing antidote to staid stage shows.

HOLLY WRIGHT

A sea of willing sacrifices

The evenings can still be quite nippy, so best dress accordingly

GOST

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

Synthwave's most extreme exponent raises the rafters

UNDER BLOOD-RED LIGHTS, a cloaked, Grim Reaper-like figure appears, holding a skull aloft in gloved hands. The subtle, wordless theatrics have the desired effect, setting up for a night of ghoulish synthwave and delighting a crowd who like a hefty dollop of horror and hyper-aggressive metal with their electronica. Michigan producer GosT draws from the same bedrock of 80s sci-fi and John Carpenter-drenched dystopia as peers Carpenter Brut, Perturbator, Dynatron and Dance With The Dead, but his most recent album, *Possessor*, has secured his place at the darker, more violent end of the synthwave spectrum.

As he arrives onstage, his face hidden under a black hood, wielding a guitar, the two laptops in front of him represent an unholy altar from which to perform his satanic sonic ritual. *Garruth* thunders monstrously from the speakers, GosT battering out the riff amid a cold, hostile assault of blastbeats and nihilistic vocals, and a packed room, made up predominantly of metalheads, bellow their approval. It takes a few songs to really get the crowd moving – it is a Monday night after all – but *Sigil*, a spectral Sisters Of Mercy-indebted anthem, and the truly terrifying *Beliar*, which revels in a black metal churn heavy enough to exorcise the demons while simultaneously slashing your brain to ribbons, incites simultaneous bouts of frenzied dancing and moshing. As the gig ends, GosT's reaper once again raises the skull in the air before the pair retreat into the shadowy underbelly where two dark musical worlds have collided.

8

DANNII LEIVERS

Yee. And indeed, haw. Danny embraces his love of country

Danny is surrounded by Snakes... of the Stereo variety

DANNY WORSNOP

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

Asking Alexandria frontman gets candid and countrified

"THIS IS JUST for me to get some self-validation," says Danny Worsnop. Love him or hate him, the Asking Alexandria frontman is raucously, refreshingly honest, and his decision to release a country music solo album is a brave move. Taking advantage of a week spent in the UK to sort out his visa, the now-US-based Danny has bagged an intimate gig in Camden Town to play acoustic songs from *The Long Road Home* and the soon-to-be-released album, *Shades Of Blue*. Whether his stetson-parading songs of horse-slapping hangover music appeals to the Asking Alexandria massive is hard to judge in a room the size of a bedsit, but the hardcore contingent are lapping it up while some tanked-up lads at the back joke around loudly during a particularly mournful number. It's safe to say people are here for Danny, not country. Neither the best of the genre nor a honky tonk homage to pre-wrecking ball-riding Miley Cyrus, tonight's show, peppered with a few AA songs, is enjoyable in its variety. Guitar and vocals duo Stereo Snakes do backing duties and Nicole Allan's voice is out of this world, adding soothing dapples of light to Danny's more depressive moments and invigorating his bro-country tunes like *I Got Bones* and *Don't Overdrink It*. This is still the same Danny Worsnop – there are boozing and dick jokes throughout – but his whiskey-soaked vocal cords are perfectly suited to this environment. Fiercely candid, funny and proud of his musical labour of love, the often vilified frontman is actually a joy to watch.

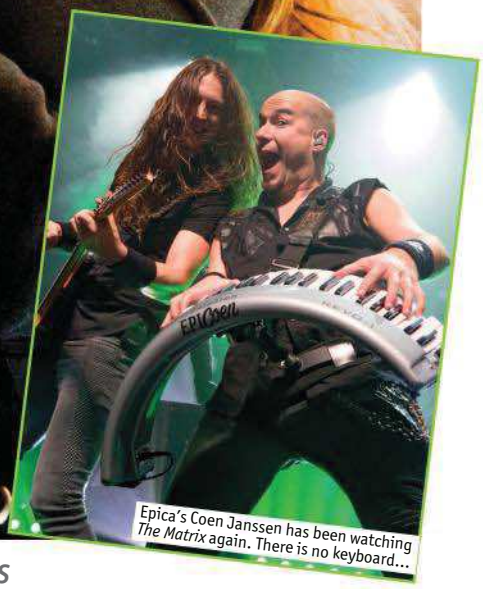
7

HOLLY WRIGHT

SKINDRED: JAMES SHEPPARD/GOST: WILL IRELAND/DANNY WORSNOP: DEREK BREMNER

Simon Simons: Epica's own red priestess

Myrkur proves a panacea for the jaded



Epica's Coen Janssen has been watching *The Matrix* again. There is no keyboard...

EPICA

MYRKUR/OCEANS OF SLUMBER

FORUM, LONDON

Simone Simons heads up a night of dramatic highs

THE THREE BANDS on this *Hammer*-sponsored tour may come from disparate corners of our world but they all share a certain penchant for the dramatic. Openers **OCEANS OF SLUMBER**'s **[8]** reputation has preceded them. Having been entranced by the Texans' excellent new album, *The Banished Heart*, plenty of metallers have turned up early to experience its seductive charms live. The doomy prog metallers' approach differs from the headliners' star-encrusted histrionics, but nonetheless, their mournful elegance ramps up the tension. Vocalist Cammie Gilbert is utterly bewitching in floor-length black lace and as her rich, soulful vocals entwine with churning Paradise Lost-like riffs on *A Path To Broken Stars* and *The Decay Of The Disregard*, it creates a cinematic ambience that's sumptuous as velvet and heavy with emotion.

This is the second time **MYRKUR [9]** has brought her full band to the capital since the release of last year's *Mareridt*. The first was a slightly anaemic performance that saw Amalie Bruun play it safe with the more gruesome elements of her sound but this time round all caution and misgivings have been tossed to the wind. Sounding hauntingly beautiful and yet horrifically grisly where she needs to be, this time Amalie gets the balance right. Her weightless vocals on the frosty pagan folk of *De Tre Piker* and *Vølvens Spådom* hypnotise the crowd into spellbound silence, allowing chilly claustrophobia to grip the room like icy fingers while, amid intense, swarming guitars, *Måneblôt* is every bit as powerful and suspenseful as we knew it could be. Cathartic and affecting, tonight proves just how special Myrkur is.

EPICA [8] have been operating on full pelt for some time now, having released some of their best music in the last few years with 2016's *The Holographic Principle* and last year's gem of an EP, *The Solace System*. Tonight's performance oozes with confidence and superlative showmanship – from start to finish, this is Epica at their most epic. Simone Simons' evocative vocals sound magical up against bombastic choirs and thrilling, orchestra-laden instrumentation, with visceral, melodic riffs adding extra dynamics to *Universal Death Squad* and *Unleashed*. The band's set is also their most lavish yet, with as many lights packed onstage as possible, while keyboardist Coen Janssen embraces every inch of symphonic metal's preposterous, silly side by barging his keyboard around the stage on its own track. Someone put this band in an arena pronto.

DANNII LEIVERS

SETLIST

Edge Of The Blade
Sensorium
Fight Your Demons
Reverence (Living In The Heart)
The Holographic Principle – A Profound Understanding Of Reality
Unleashed
Victims Of Contingency
Cry For The Moon
Unchain Utopia
Design Your Universe

ENCORE

Sancta Terra
Beyond The Matrix
Consign To Oblivion

BLEED FROM WITHIN
DYSCARNATE

THE CAMDEN ASSEMBLY, LONDON

Recovering from early technical hang-ups, UK trio **DYSCARNATE**'s **[7]** initially scrambled mix gradually sharpens to a more ear-pleasing point and discordant flourishes plummet into chuggy breakdowns. *The Promethean* and *Iron Strengthens Iron* are highlights, and though their performance remains modest for the most part, Dyscarnate's imposing brand of death metal serves as a fitting precursor to the headliners. **BLEED FROM WITHIN [8]** vocalist Scott Kennedy channels pure ferocity into the Glaswegian quintet's barrage of groovy melodic DM. Packing more meaty hooks and stomach-churning aggression than a slasher movie, the heat quickly rises in the intimate, sold-out venue as *Cast Down, Afterlife* and a Gojira-esque *Shiver* transforms the crowd into a searing ball of raw, kinetic energy. Though focusing on material from latest release *Era*, the band revisit 2013's *Uprising* with well-received drops into *It Lives In Me* and *I Am Oblivion*. After years of inactivity, BFW are better than ever.

LUKE MILNE

HAGGARD CAT
SCREECH BATS/JONNY HALIFAX & THE HOWLING TRUTH

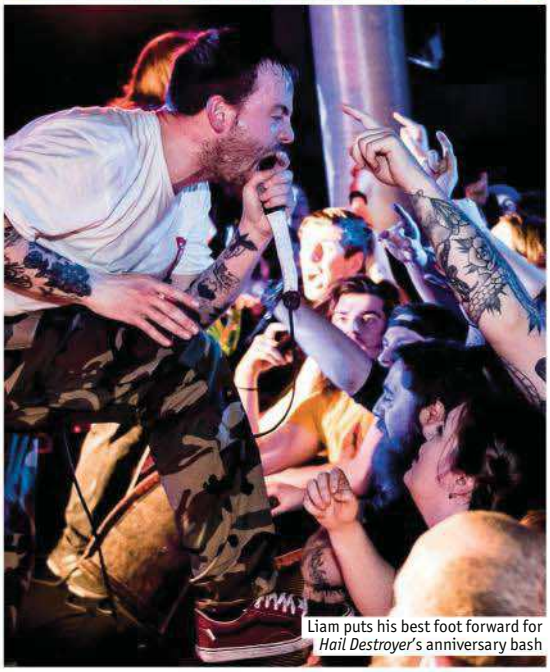
THE SEBRIGHT ARMS, LONDON

JONNY HALIFAX & THE HOWLING TRUTH [5] are the first of tonight's support acts, playing swirling blues rock that's equal parts Gun Club and Earthless. It tends toward a formless morass, but at least Jonny distracts by looking like a murderous Deep South preacher. If you fancy velvety songs about sex, death and aliens then **SCREECH BATS [6]** deliver, ironing out the kinks as they go and leaving us mulling the idea of Danzig covering The Soviettes. **HAGGARD CAT [8]** bowl onstage like they're waltzing into the chippy after five beers, but their matter-of-fact demeanour belies hulking potential. While vestigial tricksiness alludes to their post-hardcore past as Heck, frontman Matt Reynolds and drummer Tom Marsh tap into something more primal, ripping through a fat-free set of pounding, blues-scorched rawk à la Led Zep and Karma To Burn. From opener *Grave Digger* on things don't relent, and when *American Graffiti* has Matt hollering *'I'm not the devil I'm a motherfucking god!'* you do wonder if he might have a point.

ALEX DELLER

EPICA: MARIE KORNER/CANCER BATS: WILL IRELAND/OM&M: KEVIN NIXON

You want metal mayhem? Cancer Bats deliver



Liam puts his best foot forward for *Hail Destroyer*'s anniversary bash

CANCER BATS

THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Hail Destroyer gets a riotous 10th birthday party

TONIGHT MARKS THE final night of a four-night residency for Cancer Bats, who have taken refuge in The Underworld to celebrate the 10th anniversary of their second, breakthrough album, *Hail Destroyer*. Fittingly, the place goes off like an out-of-control house party. Kicking straight into their cover of Beastie Boys' *Sabotage*, with frontman Liam Cormier prowling about the stage like a wolf, there's no sign that their week of partying has left any lasting damage. Crowdsurfers surge forwards as they dive straight into a full-album run-through of that second LP, its title track still holding up as one of modern heavy metal's finest tracks. Elsewhere, *Sorceress* hits harder than ever, each of its multiple breakdowns slowed down to a steam-train chug, while *Lucifer's Rocking Chair* sees one enterprising fan stagedive, before riding the crowd all the way to the back of the room, and right back to the front again. *Pray For Darkness*, meanwhile, finds Liam demanding "the biggest fucking circlepit in the history of The Underworld" – a request that's easily met, and quickly topped. Friends and family of the band soon begin snatching mics and leaping on heads from the side of the stage, with the whole thing threatening to tip over into pandemonium by the time a snarling *Pneumonia Hawk* appears. Then, after a brief, whispered deliberation at the back of the stage, all shit is lost as *Hail Destroyer* is whipped out once more for a final, ass-kicking run-through: proof, were it needed, that Cancer Bats are masters of metal mayhem.

8

TOM CONNICK

Aaron Pauley: multitasking messiah

Wage War: as a support act, they're no deadweight

OF MICE & MEN
WAGE WAR

KOKO, LONDON

OC metalcore crew dig deep for their next phase

IT'S CLEAR THAT a large chunk of tonight's audience is here for support act **WAGE WAR [8]**. Last year's *Deadweight* was a huge step up for the Floridian metalcore crew and the glut of new tracks has injected monstrous power into their set. From opener *Alive* to impossibly huge closer *Stitch*, the band incite a floor-wide pit that swirls, bounces and seethes.

Can **OF MICE & MEN [7]** survive without Austin Carlile? That was the question at the back of everyone's minds when the erstwhile frontman left the band to focus on his battle with genetic disorder, Marfan Syndrome. The sight of a half-empty and closed-off Koko is a worrying sign but the reaction sparked by the band's arrival is nothing short of rabid. Having stepped up to the plate after Austin's departure, bassist and clean singer Aaron Pauley is doing an exceptional job at pulling off some serious multitasking, segueing with ease between eviscerating barks and carrying the weight of massive choruses. The band's recent, invigoratingly heavy album, *Defy*, was the sound of the band picking themselves up off the floor and fighting for their legacy. Yet the tracks start to make real sense live, be it the irrepressible bounce of the title track, the inescapably catchy *Instincts* or the defiant *Unbreakable*, as Aaron bellows the lyrics to *Pain* with a ferocity that pays testament to the strength and bravery of his absent friend. Are OM&M still a force to be reckoned with? On tonight's evidence, the answer is hell yes.

DANNII LEIVERS

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IN THIS MOMENT

The LA crew are heading to Download's main stage!

HOW'S 2018 TREATING YOU?
Chris Howarth (guitar): "Terrific! We've been touring across the US and Canada supporting *Ritual* and the shows have been fantastic. Canada's been on fire this year!"

YOU'RE PLAYING THE MAIN STAGE OF DOWNLOAD FOR THE FIRST TIME. HOW DOES THAT FEEL?
"It's mindblowing! We've played Download a couple times, but the main stage has always been the coveted spot. It's a huge honour and we are incredibly grateful."

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PLAYING IN IN THIS MOMENT NOW COMPARED TO THE FIRST TIME YOU PLAYED DOWNLOAD, IN 2007?
"In 2007 it was 'throw and go'. We didn't know what was going on the whole time, we were just in la la land! The show ended up being incredible. The environment was surreal, though; Iron Maiden were there, so Steve Harris is standing next to you backstage and then Bruce Dickinson walks in… iconic rock stars everywhere! It was our first time with any of that."

DO YOU REMEMBER THE SET?
"I remember it being a big tent and it was pretty full, to our surprise! We had no idea what we'd need for a festival-type show, so we ordered a backdrop, but when we hung it it was four metres wide! It was so small and ridiculous, but we had to hang it because we knew no one would know who we were otherwise. It was one of our first *Spinal Tap*-type moments, and it *had* to happen at Download!"

IS IT HARD TO DECIDE WHAT TO PUT INTO FESTIVAL SETS?
"Yes, definitely. We have six albums now and fans have their favourite tracks, and we also have songs we like as artists. We try to strike a good balance between the 'singles' and the songs we just enjoy playing live as a band."

WHAT DO YOU HAVE PLANNED FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR?
"We are touring all year in support of *Ritual*. We've a new single and video out soon, a summer tour is coming together and I even heard talk of a return to Europe. We're also working on ideas for the next album. We want to continue with the momentum we've built."

ACT OF DEFIANCE

JUL 27 LONDON UNDERWORLD
JUL 29 GLASGOW CATHOUSE
JUL 30 NEWCASTLE THINK TANK
AUG 1 CHESTER LIVE ROOMS
AUG 2 MILTON KEYNES CRAUFORD ARMS

ARCTANGENT FESTIVAL
GLASSJAW, GIRAFFES? GIRAFFES!, ROLO TOMASSI, SVALBARD, ZEAL & ARDOR, BLACK PEAKS, ALCEST + MORE

AUG 16-18 BRISTOL FERNHILL FARM

HAMMER SPONSORED

BLOODSTOCK FESTIVAL
JUDAS PRIEST, NIGHTWISH, GOJIRA, EMPEROR, DORO, WATAIN, NAILS, DEVILDRIVER, BLOODBATH, FOZZY + MORE

AUG 9-12 DERBYSHIRE CATTON HALL

BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE
OF MICE & MEN

OCT 10 LONDON ALEXANDRA PALACE
OCT 11 CARDIFF MOTORPOINT ARENA

CLUTCH

DEC 18 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY
DEC 19 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
DEC 20 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
DEC 21 LONDON O2 ACADEMY BRIXTON
DEC 22 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY

DANZIG

AUG 6 GLASGOW BARROWLANDS
AUG 7 LONDON O2 ACADEMY BRIXTON

HAMMER SPONSORED

DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL
A7X, GN'R, OZZY, MARILYN MANSON, PARKWAY DRIVE, BABYMETAL, MESHUGGAH, ASKING ALEXANDRIA + MORE

JUNE 8-10 DERBYSHIRE DONINGTON PARK

DEF LEPPARD
CHEAP TRICK

DEC 1 DUBLIN 3 ARENA
DEC 2 BELFAST SSE ARENA
DEC 4 CARDIFF MOTORPOINT ARENA
DEC 6 LONDON O2 ARENA
DEC 8 NOTTINGHAM MOTORPOINT ARENA
DEC 9 NEWCASTLE METRO RADIO ARENA
DEC 11 GLASGOW SSE HYDRO ARENA
DEC 12 MANCHESTER ARENA
DEC 14 SHEFFIELD FLYDSA ARENA
DEC 15 LIVERPOOL ECHO ARENA
DEC 17 BIRMINGHAM ARENA

EUROPE

SEP 11 BELFAST WATERFRONT
SEP 12 DUBLIN OLYMPIA THEATRE
SEP 14 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
SEP 15 GLASGOW BARROWLAND
SEP 17 NEWCASTLE O2 ACADEMY
SEP 18 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
SEP 19 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE
SEP 21 CARDIFF ST DAVID'S HALL
SEP 22 PORTSMOUTH PYRAMID CENTRE
SEP 23 LONDON ROYAL ALBERT HALL
SEP 24 BRIGHTON DOME

GLASSJAW

AUG 18 LONDON O2 BRIXTON ACADEMY

HALESTORM

SEP 19 DUBLIN ACADEMY
SEP 20 BELFAST LIMELIGHT
SEP 22 SHEFFIELD ACADEMY
SEP 23 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
SEP 24 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
SEP 26 MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
SEP 28 LONDON O2 ACADEMY BRIXTON
SEP 29 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY

HOLLYWOOD VAMPIRES
THE DARKNESS, THE DAMNED

JUN 16 BIRMINGHAM GENTING ARENA
JUN 17 MANCHESTER ARENA
JUN 19 GLASGOW SSE HYDRO
JUN 20 LONDON SSE WEMBLEY ARENA

IRON MAIDEN
KILLSWITCH ENGAGE

JUL 31 NEWCASTLE METRO RADIO ARENA
AUG 2 BELFAST SSE ARENA
AUG 4 ABERDEEN EXHIB. & CONF. CENTRE
AUG 6 MANCHESTER ARENA
AUG 7 BIRMINGHAM GENTING ARENA
AUG 10 LONDON O2 ARENA
AUG 11 LONDON O2 ARENA

INCUBUS

SEP 3 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
SEP 6 LONDON O2 ACADEMY
SEP 8 MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
SEP 10 BELFAST ULSTER HALL
SEP 11 DUBLINE BORD GÁIS ENERGY THEATRE

MACHINE HEAD
MAY 21 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
MAY 22 NEWCASTLE O2 ACADEMY
MAY 23 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
MAY 25 MANCHESTER ACADEMY

MINISTRY
CHELSEA WOLFE
JUL 17 NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY
JUL 18 GLASGOW O2 ABC
JUL 20 MANCHESTER ALBERT HALL
JUL 21 LONDON THE FORUM
JUL 23 BELFAST LIMELIGHT
JUL 24 DUBLIN TIVOLI
JUL 25 BRISTOL SWX

MONSTER MAGNET
JUN 1 GLASGOW GARAGE
JUN 2 BELFAST LIMELIGHT
JUN 4 DUBLIN TIVOLI

POWERWOLF
AMARANTHE
KISSIN' DYNAMITE
NOV 12 LONDON KOKO

SAXON
OCT 18 GLASGOW BARROWLANDS
OCT 19 LONDON ROUNDHOUSE
OCT 20 PORTSMOUTH GUILDHALL
OCT 21 MANCHESTER ACADEMY

SIKTH
JUN 2 LONDON CAMDEN ROCKS
JUL 5-9 NEWARK TECHFEST, SHOWGROUND
JUL 7 LEEDS KEY CLUB
SEP 12 STOKE UNDERGROUND
SEP 13 NEWCASTLE THINK TANK
SEP 14 SHEFFIELD THE PLUG
SEP 15 LIVERPOOL HANGAR 34
SEP 16 CARDIFF GLOBE
SEP 18 PLYMOUTH THE JUNCTION
SEP 19 SOUTHAMPTON ENGINE ROOMS
SEP 20 OXFORD BULLINGDON

STONE FREE FESTIVAL
SCORPIONS, MEGADETH, YES, BUCKCHERRY, ORANGE GOBLIN, ANATHEMA, TYKETTO, GINGER WILDHEART + MORE
JUNE 16-17 LONDON O2 ARENA

THE BRONX
JUN 9 MANCHESTER GORILLA
JUN 10 LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM

TREMONTI
JUN 28 GLASGOW ABC
JUN 29 LONDON SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE
JUN 30 BIRMINGHAM INSTITUTE
JUL 2 BELFAST LIMELIGHT
JUL 3 DUBLIN ACADEMY
JUL 5 PORTSMOUTH PYRAMIDS

UK TECH-FEST
PROTEST THE HERO, SIKTH, THE ACACIA STRAIN, NORMA JEAN, THE CONTORTIONIST, BLEED FROM WITHIN, CYCLAMEN, VOLA, DVSR, JINJER + MORE
JULY 5-9 NEWARK SHOWGROUND

HAMMER PRESENTS
WITHIN TEMPTATION
NOV 9 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
NOV 10 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
NOV 11 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
NOV 13 LONDON O2 BRIXTON ACADEMY

WOLVES IN THE THRONE ROOM
JUN 23 LONDON GARAGE
JUN 24 BIRMINGHAM SUPERSONIC FESTIVAL
JUN 25 EDINBURGH LA BELLE ANGELE
JUN 26 SHEFFIELD CORPORATION
JUN 27 LIVERPOOL INVISIBLE WIND FACTORY
JUN 28 CARDIFF THE GLOBE

WOLVES IN THE THRONE ROOM

The black metal masters hit the UK for a tour this June

HOW HAS YOUR NEW ALBUM, *THRICE WOVEN*, BEEN GOING DOWN LIVE?

Aaron Weaver (drums): "So well! That's always the question when playing new songs live: will people respond to it, or will they just go, 'Man, I wish they play that song off *Two Hunters* that I love so much'? But when we started playing *The Old Ones Are With Us, Born From The Serpent's Eye* and *Angrboda*, people are immediately into it, perhaps even more so than the old songs, which feels really good because I love this album so much."

THERE'S AN EPIC AURA CARRIED THROUGHOUT THIS LATEST ALBUM. HOW DO YOU TRANSLATE THAT TO A LIVE SHOW?

"Atmosphere is so much of it. That's what drew us into black metal originally; it's not just music, it's a whole experience. And one of mankind's oldest tricks is to use atmosphere, music, smoke, light, fire and costuming to shift our consciousness and to get into a totally different place. That's how we do it onstage; we bring the atmosphere and the spirits with us."

YOUR LIVE PERFORMANCES USE INCENSE, CANDLES, AMBIENT LIGHTING AND A TON OF OTHER VISUAL ELEMENTS. HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO PERFECT SUCH AN ELABORATE SETUP?

"It's a part of what we do. The very first shows we were doing in crust-punk squats and basements, we'd always bring candles to the show. Fifteen years ago in a basement, no one else was doing that. It's like our band and our studio; we're always building it. We're never satisfied, and we always know we are going to improve something, or make something deeper or heavier, or make the music tighter. We just finished a US tour, and that was the first tour where we used these metal totems that we'd created – I've a friend who's a blacksmith. We keep adding in stuff like that."

WHAT DO WITTR HAVE PLANNED AFTER THIS TOUR?

"There's a big tour in the works that we can't quite speak about yet. That'll be in both the US and Europe at the end of this year, start of next year. So the schedule's pretty jam-packed, but we want to get into the studio soon."

SUBTERRANEA

GOING UNDERGROUND

Dimmu Borgir: off to hang with Vikings at Midgardsblot

AGE OF TAURUS
MAY 27 LONDON THE BLACK HEART

BRITISH STEEL II
AVENGER, SALEM, SEVEN SISTERS, DESOLATION, PRIMITAI, NEURONSPOILER, ELIMINATOR, TOLEDO STEEL
MAY 25-26 LONDON UNDERWORLD

FULL OF HELL
DAWN RAY'D, LEECHER
AUG 16 LINCOLN LIQUOR
AUG 17 BELFAST VOODOO
AUG 18 LIMERICK DOLANS
AUG 19 DUBLIN GRAND SOCIALS
AUG 20 BIRMINGHAM THE ASYLUM 2
AUG 21 NEWCASTLE TRILLIANS
AUG 22 BRISTOL ROUGH TRADE RECORDS
AUG 23 LONDON UNDERWORLD
AUG 23 BRIGHTON THE GREEN DOOR STORE
AUG 24 LEEDS TEMPLE OF BOOM

LENG TCH'E
THE BROOD, WHO CARES? LUNATIC HOOKER
JUN 4 LONDON UNDERWORLD

MIDGARDSBLOT
DIMMU BORGIR, WATAIN, ENSIFERUM, ROTTING CHRIST, HAMFERÐ, ÁRABROT + MORE
AUG 16-18 BORRE MIDGARD HISTORISK SENTER

OF THE WAND AND THE MOON
AUG 16 LONDON BOSTON MUSIC ROOM

PALLBEARER
JUL 16 LONDON ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL
JUL 17 GLASGOW STEREO
JUL 18 LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB
JUL 19 BRISTOL THE FLEECE

RAW POWER
GODFLESH, CIRCLES, GHOLD, 11PARANOIAS, COCAINE PISS, PIGS X 7 + MORE
MAY 25-27 LONDON THE DOME/ BOSTON MUSIC ROOM

SADISTIC INTENT
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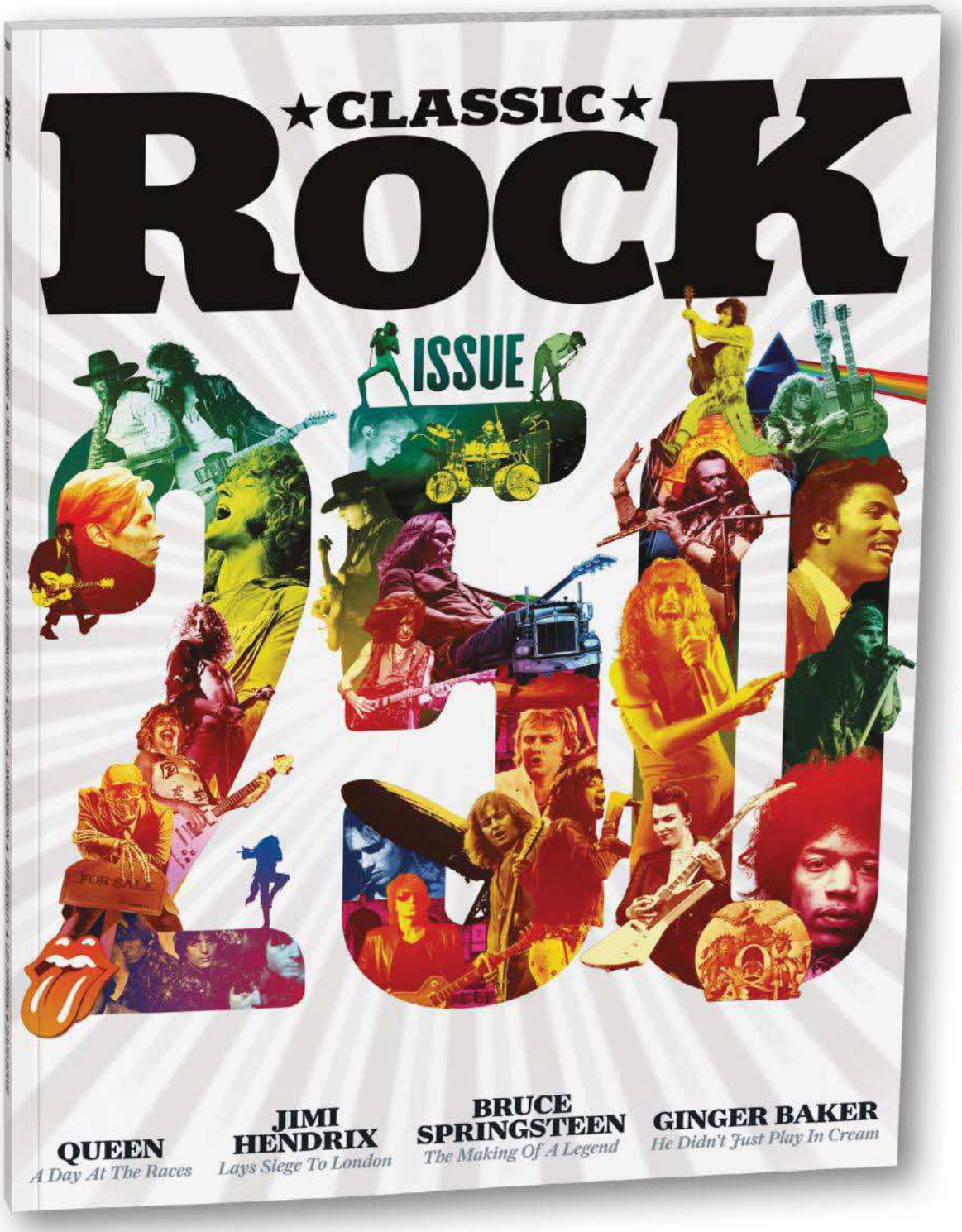

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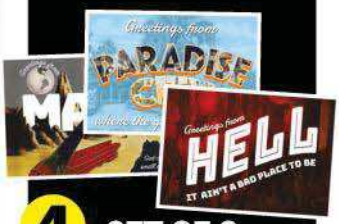

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IRELAND'S RABBLE-ROUSERS HIT THE UK

"THERE IS NOTHING TO REGRET"

IMMORTAL

NORWAY'S BLIZZARD KINGS RETURN FROM THE COLD

THE NORTH AWAKENS

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

After Abbath returned from the rubble of Immortal, all eyes turned to what remaining members Demonaz and Horgh would do next. Now that question has been answered

Of all the bands that emerged from the Norwegian black metal explosion of the early 90s, Immortal alone elicit the kind of mad-eyed devotion that marks out the truly legendary. Consequently, the band's return stands out as one of *the* events of 2018. But the impending release of ninth studio album *Northern Chaos Gods* isn't just the next chapter in an illustrious saga; this time, new Immortal material arrives bearing the weight of long-held expectations *and* against a backdrop of behind-the-scenes turmoil caused by the acrimonious departure of talismanic frontman Abbath in 2014, and a subsequent legal tussle over rights to the band's name and logo.

In October 2015, remaining members Demonaz and Horgh issued a statement in the wake of winning the court battle, declaring that "the conflict was not about anyone leaving the band, as Abbath claimed. It was all about his personal problems. He had cancelled rehearsals and ruined the band's progress for a very long time. We were forced to confront him about it… He told the band, friends and family that he needed to go to rehab again. He had got help from a clinic before. We offered to wait for him to recover this time also. Sadly, he changed his decision."

According to the statement, Abbath then secretly applied for a trademark ownership of the band's logo and name, only to be denied by the court who surmised, not unreasonably, that he was a co-writer rather than the band's sole composer. The eventual result of those not entirely edifying legal proceedings is that Abbath is now a solo artist and Immortal are back, not so much in a new incarnation as an old one redesigned: for the first time since 1997's *Blizzard Beasts* album, founder member and long-time lyricist Demonaz is back on guitar and, for the first time ever, providing vocals, too. Back in 1997, he had to step away from his onstage role as a result of a brutal dose of tendonitis, but a combination of necessity and good fortune have brought him enthusiastically back to Immortal's onstage A-team.

"I had a shoulder operation in 2011 and it made my arm work properly again so things became different," he shrugs. "The vocal thing? Well, me and Horgh were working on the songs for the album and we just decided that I would do the vocals. It felt natural to do it. It's difficult to explain, but we've worked so hard on this band for all these years that it just felt normal to do it. I've been a part of this band since we started it, so who else could do it?"

"THERE'S NOTHING TO REGRET"

DEMONAZ REFUSED TO PIAF ABOUT AFTER ABBATH'S DEPARTURE

For once in the metal world, this is a line-up shuffle that few purists should complain about. Demonaz is both an original member and the chief architect of Immortal's conceptual universe, while Horgh has been a permanent fixture in the band since the mid-90s. This being 2018, of course, the return of Immortal *without* Abbath will inevitably receive its fair share of spitty-lipped opprobrium. This, daft people will doubtless say, is not the *real* Immortal.

"Well, I can't really think about that," Demonaz muses with a chuckle. "If we had to think about what people thought of this band from the start, we would've broken up many years ago. There were always a lot of critics, right from the start. It was like, 'We're Immortal and no one likes us!' you know? Ha ha ha! We *always* felt like that. Having said that, there is a great bond between us and our fans. They will understand that we never gave up on this band. We never stopped. And now it's time to move on."

As it turns out, Demonaz and Horgh seem to have been holding the black metal equivalent of a royal flush. From the blitzkrieg battery of the opening title track onwards, *Northern Chaos Gods* is an explosive, gripping and supremely confident return; easily as epic and vicious as anything in Immortal's catalogue and yet subtly fresh and surprising, too. The absence of Abbath's iconic snarl and trademark guitar tone aside, it's hard to imagine a more imperious musical rebirth, as songs like the seething *Into Battle Ride* and the Maiden-saluting *Where Mountains Rise* strike a sublime balance between grandeur and grimness. There is a definite sense that a lot of time has been spent on ensuring that the new album is exactly what it needs to be, regardless of what fans or critics might be desiring or expecting.

"We just said, 'Let's take a step back and do this properly and deliver the best album we can…'," Demonaz states. "We've always talked about making the ultimate Immortal album, but we never really had the chance to think it through properly. So maybe that's

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GOING UNDERGROUND

Horgh and Demonaz view the situation as very black and white, and have no regrets

something we've done this time. We had no pressure, we just took our time and made a fucking kick-ass album. We didn't think about perfection. Everything felt natural. We had time to think, maybe for the first time. I guess you could say that we had all the time in the world! Ha ha ha!"

It's far from unusual for a Norwegian black metal musician to express a total disregard for outside influence or pressure, but somehow it rings far more true coming from Demonaz. Immortal have never exhibited even the teensiest sliver of interest in compromising on their original vision, lyrical flights of fancy through the mythical, symbolic kingdom of Blashyrkh included. If anything, *Northern Chaos Gods* represents the expansion and refinement of that irresistible Immortal essence, as if all the trials and disruptions of recent years have pushed Demonaz and Horgh to focus ever more closely on what the now-frontman describes as "the right Immortal feeling".

"We wanted to create a diverse album, but still fast and *spectacular*," he grins. "The last track, *Mighty Ravendark*, it's nearly 10 minutes long, it's really epic. I always wanted to do something like that, something massive. Perhaps this was our first opportunity to do a few of these things, but if you listen to the album, you'll hear a lot of that *old* Immortal feeling, too. I'm really into those first four or five albums and I wanted to bring back the intensity that we had at that time. I really wanted that to come through the speakers, that Immortal *attack*."

"OUR FANS UNDERSTAND THAT WE NEVER GAVE UP ON THIS BAND"

DEMONAZ IS DRIVEN BY A PERSISTENT GENE

As furious as the songs on *Northern Chaos Gods* manifestly are, Demonaz himself cuts an amiable and relaxed figure today. Noticeably delighted to hear our positive first impressions of the new album and eager to note how excited he is to be resurrecting the band he formed way back in 1991, he nonchalantly notes that, "I just didn't see any reason to put this down and I think people will understand that." Of course, he is also more than aware that many people will be hoping for vitriolic denouncements of his former bandmate, but several years on from the split and with a brand new album primed for launch, Immortal's other founder member has already moved on. With the album completed and promotion underway, he is now beginning to focus on establishing and rehearsing a new line-up for the in-the-flesh onslaught to come. Demonaz's long-awaited return to the stage, you may be ecstatic to hear, is very much on the cards. Meanwhile, he and loyal comrade Horgh have simply picked up where their band left off nearly a decade ago, armed with that unmistakable Immortal spirit and driven by a primal need to keep ploughing – or perhaps *blasting* – inexorably forward into the bleak Blashyrkh landscapes, with no compromises and no regrets.

"Do I regret anything? Not really, because I can't change any of it," Demonaz muses. "We tried to solve the situation with Abbath, but in the end we couldn't agree on it. It doesn't look like that'll change in the future, so yeah, I guess you never know. But 2014 wasn't the first time. The band broke up once before. Some decisions were made and we moved on. There's nothing to regret. That wouldn't help me or anyone else. So it's history and I can't change history. The only thing we can do is try to make the best out of the situation… and to make sure every album kicks the ass of the last one! Ha ha ha!" ✠

***NORTHERN CHAOS GODS* IS RELEASED ON JULY 6 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

DUAL TO THE DEATH

Three more black-hearted bands that have been, oh yes, *cleft in twain*

NEGURĂ BUNGET

Widely hailed as one of the metal underground's most fascinating and adventurous bands, Transylvania's Negură Bunget had the wind in their sails before founder members Hupogrammos and Negru had a major bust-up in 2009, following their masterpiece, *Om*. Negru kept the original band on the rails until his untimely death at the age of 42 last year, while his estranged colleague returned with the equally mindblowing Dordeduh.

FIELDS OF THE NEPHILIM

When frontman Carl McCoy quit the Nephilim fold in 1991, one monumental goth rock band became two. McCoy re-emerged as The Nefilim, with a heavier, more overtly metallic sound. His erstwhile comrades found a new singer and became Rubicon. However, neither band conjured quite the same magic as their shared alma mater and a somewhat inevitable FOTN resurrection took place in 1998.

VENOM

Their legendary status is unquestionable, but the end result of decades of bickering is that we now have both Venom *and* Venom Inc. The former are led by original frontman Cronos, while the latter feature original members Abaddon and Mantas alongside Tony Dolan, who fronted Venom between '89 and '92. More Venom is a good thing, clearly.

Cronos: a titan among frontmen

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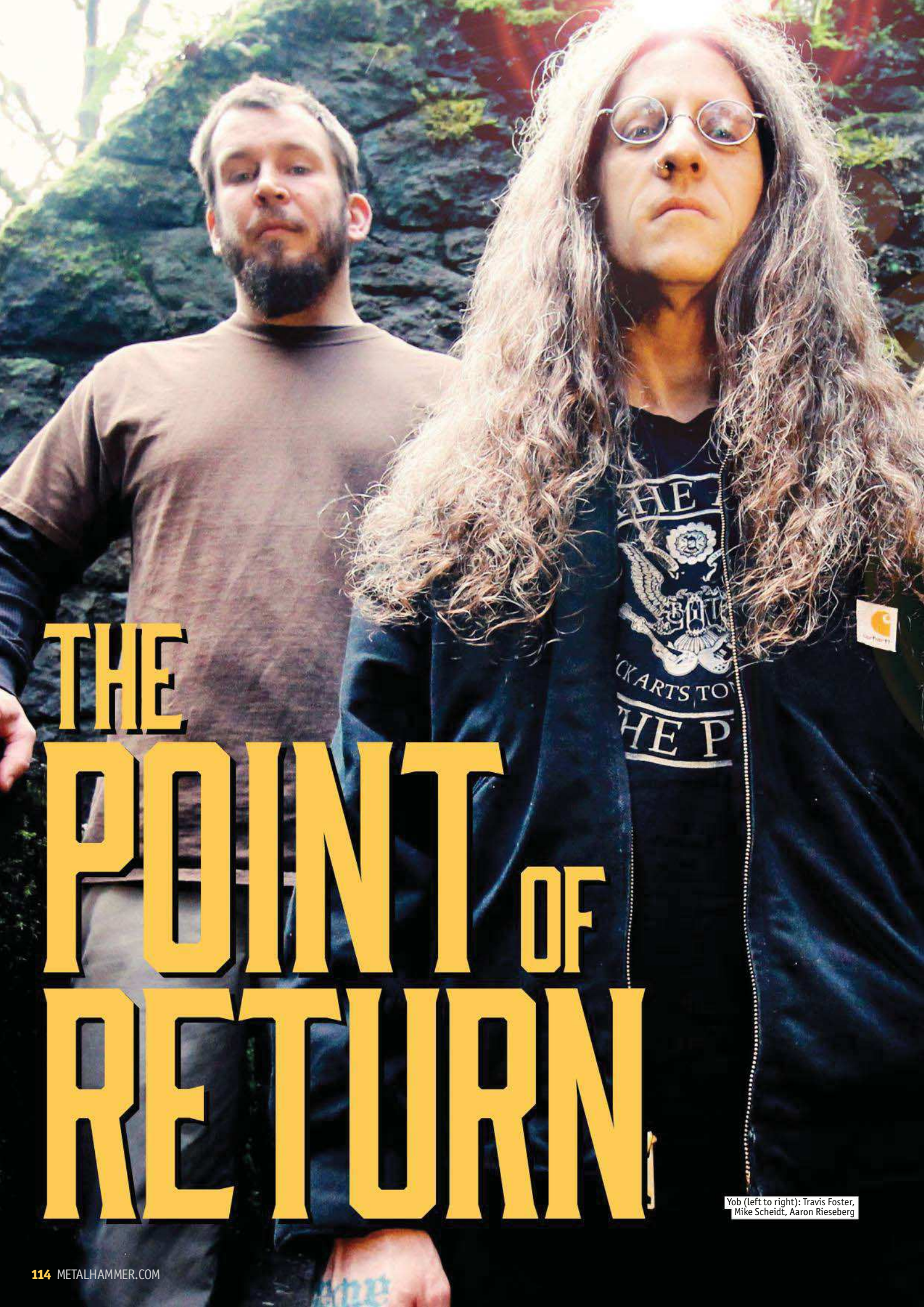

THE POINT OF RETURN

Yob (left to right): Travis Foster, Mike Scheidt, Aaron Rieseberg

PICS: ORION LANDAU

YOB

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GOING UNDERGROUND

Yob have long been doom's most mystical torchbearers, but when frontman Mike Scheidt came close to death, he called on every spiritual resource to make it through

WORDS: TOM O'BOYLE

It was while on a European tour in 2016 that Mike Scheidt, frontman and conceptual philosopher of transcendent doom trio Yob – a band completed by bassist Aaron Rieseberg and drummer Travis Foster – began to experience severe abdominal pain. He put it down to food poisoning. Soon after returning home he went to the bathroom and was greeted by the disturbing sight of a toilet full of blood. "I'm not one to go to the doctor typically, in old-school macho fashion," he laughs self-deprecatingly. "However, that was a situation where I decided I should probably go."

Doctors immediately carried out a scan, diagnosing him with Diverticulitis, a disease that causes serious infection of the large intestine. "It wasn't impressed upon me how serious it was," he remembers. He began to manage the pain with prescribed medication and a healthy regime that saw him attain the best shape of his life. Then, while out on tour with his admired friends Neurosis, the pain returned, so severe that Mike realised that he had to get to hospital.

"The pain was so bad I blacked out," he remembers, soberly. "I had a far-out, mystical experience, and was completely unaware that I was on a hospital bed, writhing, making inhuman noises. Basically, I was dying." Prescribed the strongest antibiotics available, Mike remained in hospital for three days, drip-fed. Gradually he improved, but before doctors were willing to discharge him they wanted to see how he handled food. "I had a seizure," he continues. "My temperature went from normal to 104 in three minutes. I was shaking and flopping on the bed."

He was rushed into emergency surgery for a three-hour procedure. "It took closer to eight or nine hours, because I was so messed up," he rues. "A lot of damage had been done. They had to take a wire brush to my insides. Somewhere in the middle of the surgery the surgeon decided to blast some Yob while they worked on me; they were worried I was dying. When I found out, I cried."

Mike had 10 inches of colon removed during the surgery and has since recovered well, but not without a gruelling recovery process that saw him contract a bacterial infection and shingles. It was an ordeal and he feels his path of self-discovery, cathartically explored over 20 years of writing Yob's music, aided him greatly in his ability to cope. This gets deep.

"It's what I've always felt compelled to write about," he begins. "I've never wanted to write about wisdom that I didn't have at least some kind of taste of, because that would be lying in a way, so I've tried to anchor it in the mud of my actual suffering."

It's no secret that Mike has long endured depression, some times faring better than other times, but he's self-aware enough to have committed himself to attempting to understand and control his perspective, seeking wisdom in various philosophies, which resonate through all of Yob's glacially paced, enlightening odysseys.

"I DIDN'T KNOW IF I WAS GONNA LIVE TO SHOW THE MUSIC TO MY BANDMATES"

MIKE SCHEIDT REFUSED TO LET THE NEW ALBUM BECOME HIS EPITAPH

"Everything that I've learned came to my aid when I was sitting in my hospital room post-surgery," Mike impresses. "The room was filled with apparitions all talking at once. Some I could see clearly, others were shadows. My mother said that at one point I blurted out, 'OK, I get it!' They just wouldn't shut up. I started doing some Tibetan Buddhist mantras I know and the things would float away. At one point I felt something jump up on the bed. It was a silver cat. It came up on my chest, but I didn't feel any pain, because it wasn't there. I wrapped my arms around it and felt a sense of love that is hard to put into words."

It's an experience that's had an indelible effect on the frontman, inspiring a prolific bout of creativity. "Things that I thought I knew before I realised that I didn't know, and that in fact I was only getting a real introduction to them now," he explains, with a cryptic predisposition that permeates an intense conversation that lasts for more than two hours, Mike frequently diverging down

Yob: spiritual connection

thought trails littered with profundities expressed in abstract ways. "I also saw with clarity a lot of things about me that need work, but where before I would see those things with shame, a sense of wanting to hide from that inner voice that's like a whip, my perception had shifted. It was the first time I've ever felt I had a choice, as in, 'OK what do I do with that?'"

It came naturally to him to pick up his guitar – albeit a lighter model he was capable of playing in his weakened state that his guitar sponsors Monson made specially for him. The result is Yob's eighth album, *Our Raw Heart*. It sees the band exploring at once familiar and yet different territories, still packed with the profoundly crushing, spiritually charged doom that is their staple, but imbued with a fragility, at once a documentary of Mike's fight for his life as much as it is a celebration of that life, the simple joy that the band were once again able to play together after a period of time where it seemed like that may never happen.

"In the process of writing this album I didn't know if I was gonna live long enough to show it to my bandmates," Mike continues. "I was writing, feeling really inspired, and that by itself had to be good enough." It proved the best possible therapy, months after fighting for his life on the operating table, Yob blasting into his unconscious mind, it once again proved his lifeline.

"I look at it like a full circle," Mike explains. "In January 2017 I almost died three times, and in October we entered the studio and recorded an album that feels to us as vital as anything we've ever done."

"I'VE NEVER FELT MORE UNSURE ABOUT THE STATE OF THE WORLD"

MIKE SCHEIDT'S NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE HAS GIVEN HIM A HEIGHTENED SENSITIVITY

Aware of the fact that much of the conversation has focused solely on his recent traumas, Mike is keen to impress the importance of his bandmates. This is by no means the Mike Scheidt show. "I get a lot of attention," he acknowledges, "and I struggle with it. What Yob really is, is a network of relationships and connections with my bandmates; there is no us without them, what they bring to table with their musicality and wisdom. If one person leaves, this band will be over."

Fortunately for all of us, that is something that has not yet come to pass, the band focused on the present moment – a mantra of mindfulness that has been the core philosophy of Yob's path toward inner peace for their entire history. It's Mike's hope that in these explorations of his inner turmoil – his raw heart – that likeminded folks can find empathy, solace and rejuvenating spaces within which positivity can flourish; positivity that on a wider scale could contribute to building a better world.

"I want to support evolution," he says in earnest. "I don't know what it looks like, I have no delusions of grandeur; I'm not on a soapbox. Since I almost died I've never felt more unsure about the state of the world. I'm so glad there are people out there trying to bring awareness and wisdom. I try to drink from those wells and find my own connection. I'm not trying to convince others, it's just what I think about all day long. This is the world we've created and the only way out is through. We have to work together to find common ground." ✠

***OUR RAW HEART* IS RELEASED ON JUNE 8 VIA RELAPSE**

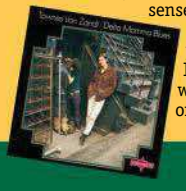
ONCE MORE, WITH HEALING

Mike Scheidt picks out three records in which to find spiritual solace

TOWNES VAN ZANDT

Delta Momma Blues (1971)

"Townes was himself. He had his trials and destructive elements. He touched on a depth of truth that's so giant it can't be contained. When I think of songwriting, of emotive human truthfulness, he represents it. He didn't shrink away from joy or sorrow, and he didn't shrink away from love."



NEUROSIS

Given To The Rising (2007)

"Neurosis have a foot in their legacy and a foot in the new. As they've evolved, they've brought more and more of this sense of tribe, sense of the elements. It's a deep, primordial spirituality. I can't leave the house without every record on my phone!"

DEPECHE MODE

Music For The Masses (1987)

"Those songs are burned into me. I can't listen to that album and not be taken back to a time where I felt a lot of indignant fire, but was also very sensitive and struggling with how to interface with the world. That album was a medicine for that."

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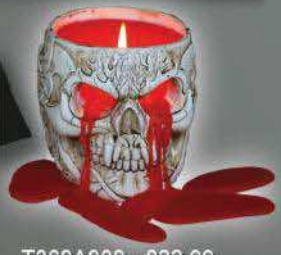

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Messa: their new, water-themed album is no damp squib

JAZZ-TINGED, DOOM DIABOLISM!

MESSA

Immersive Italians invoke The Great Beast

WORDS: LIAM YATES

Italian coven Messa are set to unveil their new album, *Feast For Water*. A work of beautifully haunting and sophisticated, jazz-infused doomy decadence, it's brimming with elegantly mesmerising vocal incantations, delicate Rhodes piano flourishes and moody, 70s fuzz-dirge – a style the band affectionately refers to as 'Scarlet doom'.

Channelling some heavy esoteric subject matter, *Feast For Water* is a concept album dealing with occult themes, in particular the symbolic and ritual features of the liquid element. "When we started composing this album," vocalist Sara explains, "we imagined it as the subsequent part of our first record, *Belfry*. The concept of that album is the bell tower, and how it gathers people all together. The cover of *Belfry* features a half-submerged tower. The second part starts with a dive in the lake. It's a journey that draws the person into the darkness of deep waters. Water is a symbolic element of pureness, simplicity. And it's very important in rituals of any kind, especially for initiations. Water can bring life, and steal it."

Feast... showcases the band's progression from heavy metal dirge towards more intricate and mature compositions. The catalyst for this shift, Sara explains, was the Rhodes piano bought by guitarist Alberto. "We decided to incorporate this instrument into the compositions, because we loved it. It allowed us to experiment and be more creative with our music. The choice of using Rhodes piano, together with the chord voicings, made everything sound more 'jazzy'. *Feast For Water* is a more complex record, and we spent a lot of time in the rehearsal room to make it sound exactly how we wanted. Still, it was something spontaneous and natural. We just moved to a different territory, but we managed to retain our 'heavier' roots. When we feel the urge, we will start developing the third part of this path! We wouldn't want our records to sound all the same. We love the prismatic nature of music"

> "Water can bring life... and steal it"
> **SARA**

Messa's quirky 'Scarlet doom' moniker and songtitles hint at the band's cryptic subject matter and influence from the works of the notorious English occultist Aleister Crowley. "I went to Thelema Abbey [the site of Crowley's temple in Sicily] twice last year," says Sara. "Actually, the lyrics to our song *Leah* were born after spending some hours inside that place. During the creation of the album I've been reading pieces like *The Book Of Lies* by Aleister Crowley, poetry by Yeats and *Songs For The Witch Woman* by Jack Parsons and Marjorie Cameron. These are just some examples. This record is just a result of all our personalities mixed together, all our interests, spirit and visions materialised into this kind of work. I think doing music is magical, somehow, but we don't have a 'manifesto' so to say. Messa's lyrics are very personal and are just a way I feel and see the things around me. It's just my own perspective."

Perhaps as a result of the country's dominant Catholic regime, Italy's heavy metal scene seems to be defiantly linked to the occult. Bands like Death SS, Jacula, and Mortuary Drape all seem to have been very serious when combining their religious beliefs with music, creating a culture that Messa have clearly drawn inspiration from. "Being born and raised in a strict Catholic ambience is a perfect spark for destroying it," Sara concludes. "Being forced to follow something you don't believe in was more prevalent back in time. Those bands were fundamental for the Italian underground, I think, because they opened the doors for all that came next." ✠

LINE-UP: Sara (vocals), Marco (guitar/bass), Rocco (drums), Alberto (lead guitar/Rhodes piano)
HOMETOWN: Cittadella, Italy
SOUNDS LIKE: Poignant, jazz-tinged doom metal that transcends the usual Sabbath formulas.
FOR FANS OF: Jex Thoth, Bohren Und Der Club Of Gore, The Devil's Blood
CURRENT RELEASE: *Feast For Water* (Aural Music, 2018)
WEBSITE: www.facebook.com/messaproject

Drug Cult cultivate more inspiration

RITUALISTIC DOOM/PSYCH SUMMONINGS!

DRUG CULT

Arcane Australians open a sacred channel

WORDS: DEAN BROWN

There's something bewitching and deafeningly loud echoing out from near the foothills of Mount Chincogan in Mullumbimby, a remote town in New South Wales, Australia. A four-person occult group, Drug Cult, who formed after a megaritual ceremony during a 'blood moon' lunar eclipse in 2015, have claimed responsibility for it. Theirs is a sound beholden to the foreboding Sabbathian mysteries of metal's formative days, heightened by the feedback-scorched ritualism of Electric Wizard and other psychedelic entities.

"We are four individual people with a common lust for the creative vessel the void bestows on us," the sect states. "Our energies found each other at a time we all needed to channel and exorcise our individual demons. In our natural and mystical surroundings, the occult energy guided us to this release."

Outside of the occult leanings, masculine and feminine dynamisms also permeate Drug Cult's self-titled debut, as lurching and lumbering riffs and rhythms and enchantress-like vocals entwine, the latter rapturously musing upon doom-centric topics such as "depression, anxiety, mind-awareness, astral feelings, and openness to receive knowledge and wisdom".

Such intoxicating sonics, captured live to tape, and themes that explore the tangible aspects of human nature as well as the metaphysical, not to mention the band's name, lead us to wonder whether any third-eye-openers were used during the creative process?

"For centuries, humans have used drugs like hallucinogens, wine and resins to bring them closer to mystical encounters," the collective offers. "Legal drugs are far more dangerous and provoke madness, illness and death – a blockage to the spiritual channel. Plant-based substances that have been deemed illegal are actually powerful healers and mind-expanding tools for us to create a more harmonious environment, internally and externally. Entheogens and natural substances definitely aided our vibrations. Sacred channels must be opened in order to fully realise ideas received from the void."

LINE-UP: Aasha Tozer (vocals), Vin Steele (guitars), Dale Walker (drums), Maggie Schreiber (bass)
HOMETOWN: Mullumbimby, NSW, Australia
SOUNDS LIKE: A potent hit of arcane doom-rock with psychedelic side-effects.
FOR FANS OF: Electric Wizard, Windhand, Acid King
CURRENT RELEASE: *Drug Cult* (Ritual Productions, 2018)
WEBSITE: www.facebook.com/drugcult

Goatkraft: war mongers

BATTLE-READY BLACK/DEATH BRUTALISM!

GOATKRAFT

Bergen blasphemers seek more war-ravaged pastures

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

So many bands claim to make music that is raw, violent and blasphemous that those adjectives can begin to sound meaningless. But then you find your ears assailed by Goatkraft's seething, riotously hellbound *Angel Slaughter* EP and, suddenly, everything starts to make sense again. Formed in Bergen, Norway little more than a year ago, this gruffly mysterious trio are proudly inspired by underground savagery from Brazil, Australia and North America, rather than the Norse old school.

"Our masterplan was to create aggressive music, record evil albums and to play gigs," states frontman G. "The usual things for a war metal band, I guess. We had an urge to play more in a Blasphemy/Sarcofago/Black Witchery vein and we didn't care about anything else. We didn't want Goatkraft to be another band from Norway that plays 'Norsk Black Metal'. As far as I know, we are the only band from Bergen who play this way, and probably the only one in Norway as well."

Not quite 20 minutes of full-pelt scabrous noise, *Angel Slaughter* is clearly not the work of a band that gives two shits about pleasing anyone but themselves. Fortunately, that's precisely the kind of myopic militancy that has long made war metal a subgenre that can be relied upon to deliver uncompromising extremity. Lyrically, too, it's a metallic strain with little room for conceptual manoeuvre and with zero interest in broadening its reach. Not surprisingly, Goatkraft see this as a definite plus. So fuck you.

"We sing about death and destruction!" G. proclaims, proudly. "We are not trying to convey *anything* to people. We don't care about people in general. Our music is directed to bestial black metal maniacs and they are the only ones that we care about as a band. They know what war metal is all about. For all the others, our music is just a common noise. Let it stay that way."

LINE-UP: G. (guitar/vocals), A. (bass/vocals), O. (guitars)
HOMETOWN: Bergen, Norway
SOUNDS LIKE: Vicious, ultra-blackened war metal with a hard-on for Beelzebub.
FOR FANS OF: Bestial Warlust, Black Witchery, Revenge
CURRENT RELEASE: *Angel Slaughter* (Iron Bonehead Productions, 2018)
WEBSITE: goatkraft.bandcamp.com

Yob want you to get lost... in the nicest possible way

Yob

Our Raw Heart

RELAPSE

Oregon's psych-doom colossus rises again

MONOLITHIC, MONUMENTAL, monstrous... the words we use to feebly describe the sheer enormity of Yob's music hardly seem fit for purpose at this point. One of those rare bands whose every release feels like a genuine event, the Oregon space-doom legends have conceivably been able to take four years between albums because many fans are still lost in the swirling sonic vortex conjured by 2014's *Clearing The Path To Ascend*... and may never come back. But they should definitely *try*, at least, because *Our Raw Heart* is an album of even greater depth and density.

Ten minutes of sprawling but austere doom-via-post-metal, opener *Ablaze* is the sound of Mike Scheidt in full cosmic hellfire mode, his increasingly soulful voice soaring above wave upon wave of thick, sinewy riffing. But it's the second track, *The Screen*, that provides the album's first startling revelation: built on a grinding staccato riff that is more Gojira than Grief, its glacial creep intermittently morphs into a chorus of euphoric grandeur, oozing spiritual ennui and a gripping hint of menace. There is even an unmistakable trace of Triptykon-like morbidity to that main riff and its deathly, end-of-song payoff: evidence, perhaps, of psychedelic dreams turned sour and sinister.

It certainly feels like Yob's harnessing of altered states has taken a dark turn here. The traumatic reality of the frontman's recent near-death experience

at the mercy of a rare intestinal disease hangs heavy over every note; the band's trademark wall of shimmering distortion is supplanted by a gruffer, more muscular approach, as showcased on *In Reverie*'s opening riff, which sounds like some acid-fuelled Bongripper funeral march before Mike Scheidt's angsty roar bursts through the gloom. While more oppressive than immersive, it's every bit as absorbing as the band's greatest moments. By the time you reach the album's two colossal epics, *Beauty In Falling Leaves* and the climactic title track, you may already have been pummelled into submission, but *Our Raw Heart* is an album that boasts as much ingenuity, charisma and excoriating emotion as it does skull-powdering heaviness. Surrender now, thank us later.

9

FOR FANS OF: **Ufomammut, Lesbian, Ahab**

DOM LAWSON

Age Of Taurus

The Colony Slain

RISE ABOVE

A bullish return for country-spanning true doom troubadours

Continuing the turbulent tale of the fictional Taurean Empire, the UK/Norway-based foursome's first album in five years sees the doomsters ratcheting up their NWOBHM and prog rock influences to create a record rich with ideas. Inspired by the likes of Trouble and the dearly departed fantasy writer Terry Pratchett, the arrival of a new bassist, ex-Cathedral member Leo Smee, and guitarist Daniel Knight has helped put more meat on the bones of Toby W Wright's music, ushering in a bold new chapter for the band. Adopting synths and strange time signatures (*Beyond The Westward Path*) and dramatic *Great Gig In The Sky*-flavoured female backing vocals (*The Trial Of Blackwynn Chaise*) to score their story, the Rainbow-minded title track rocks with the best of them, while *Taken To The Tower* is a formidable slab of old-school heavy metal thunder.

7

FOR FANS OF: **Trouble, Candlemass, Revelation**

EDWIN McFEE

Alkaloid

Liquid Anatomy

SEASON OF MIST

German adventurers reach a new prog death peak

Death metal's expansion into more cerebral realms has thrown up some extraordinary music, but there is something about Alkaloid's zealously progressive approach that feels wonderfully unprecedented. *Liquid Anatomy*'s opening track alone speaks volumes about the Germans' open-minded ethos. It begins as a very modern-sounding prog ballad, before erupting into skewed deathly fury, peaking with a riff that wouldn't have sounded out of place on a Dokken album in the 80s. But where some likeminded bands deliver their twists and turns with self-conscious smugness, every last barking-mad transition feels natural and seamless. The epic *As Decreed By Laws Unwritten* forces *Domination*-era Morbid Angel through a prism of grim psychedelia, Azagthoth-style riffs toying with post-djent melody and syncopation as the title track moves from elegiac restraint to primal crunch and back again. Bewildering and brilliant from start to finish.

8

FOR FANS OF: **Opeth, Barren Earth, Howling Sycamore**

DOM LAWSON

Asphagor

The Cleansing

BLACK SUNSET/MDD

A big, bold black metal blast from Angerberg, Austria

Bombarded as we are by post- and atmospheric black metal records with only a slender musical connection to anything metallic, something as straightforwardly bombastic and violent as *The Cleansing* increasingly stands out as a breath of infernal fresh air. At first, this belongs squarely in Dark Funeral and *Twilight*-era Gorgoroth territory, where a decent production job is wielded as a weapon of destruction and occasional moments of respite exist primarily to spare your neck muscles for a few seconds. Luckily, Asphagor know how to write memorable songs too. As suggested by the insidious melodies and brooding grooves of *The Solipsist*, this is not quite the big, dumb black metal record that it first appears to be. Both *(In The) Sea Of Empty Shells* and *Circle Of Abaddon* showcase the ongoing broadening of the band's vision and the closing title track is a melancholy monster.

7

FOR FANS OF: **Dark Funeral, Dimmu Borgir, In Mourning**

DOM LAWSON

Blitzkrieg
Judge Not!
MIGHTY MUSIC

Sunderland's heavy metal institution sharpen their senses

Proud figureheads of the NENWOBHM – that's North East NWOBHM – Blitzkrieg have reformed a number of times around vocalist Brian Ross, who is currently pulling double shifts with the glorious resurgence of Satan; their 2013 LP, *Life Sentence*, is the ultimate NWOBHM comeback album. *Judge Not!* goes from beefed-up modern metal bruisers like the opening brace of *Heretic* and *Who Is Blind* through to the pure 80s of *Loud And Proud*, replete with chanting midsection: clearly aimed at a 1985 Monsters Of Rock crowd participation. *Wide Legged And Headless* also invokes big 80s hair but with modern, in-your-face guitar tones. Those looking for the authentic retro sounds of Neat records circa 1981 should look elsewhere (Sweden probably), but if you want the spirit of the 80s with modern production values then *Judge Not!* is a good bet. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Satan, Saxon, Avenger

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

Dylan Carlson
Conquistador
SARGENT HOUSE

Earth mainman returns to his regular state of reverie

After Earth's uneven foray into droning hard rock with 2014's *Primitive And Deadly*, and collaborating with electronic musician The Bug for last year's *Concrete Desert, Conquistador* finds mainman Dylan Carlson back to doing what he arguably does best: parched, drone-heavy, meandering Americana. For those already familiar with Carlson's 'Drcarlsonalbion' phase, and the bone-dry twang and wandering malaise of his soundtrack to the alt-western *Gold* in particular, *Conquistador* offers few surprises. The pulsing drone of layered guitars and brittle, monotonous movements of the title track sit somewhere between Earth's last outing and Neil Young's *Dead Man* soundtrack, as does the broodingly repetitious *Scorpions In Their Mouths* and closer *Reaching The Gulf*. In between, Dylan does find room for uncomfortable noise à la *Mule Variations*-era Tom Waits with *And Then The Crows Descended*, which sounds like insects crawling out of your empty skull. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Neil Young, GY!BE, Tom Waits

TOBY COOK

Exmortus
The Sound Of Steel
PROSTHETIC

US melodeath marauders look beyond Gothenburg for inspiration

It's not unusual for melodeath bands to look to Sweden. However, instead of Gothenburg circa 1995, Exmortus's eyes are focused on Malmö and Stockholm circa 1982. Album number five is modern-sounding death metal, but with the blood of Malmsteen, Silver Mountain and Proud flowing through its veins. *The Sound Of Steel* sits in that sweet spot between technical thrash and death metal – crunchy, muscular riffing that's part Friedman-era Megadeth and part latter-day Carcass – but topped off with 80s-style neo-classical metal shredding, kind of like a vintage Bentley body on a Sherman tank. The likes of *Feast Of Flesh* and *To The Ends Of The Earth* showcase some serious chops, with some musical muscle borrowed from Warbringer: pyrotechnic lead playing and a seriously well-executed slab of metal. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Carcass, Yngwie J Malmsteen, Skeletonwitch

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

Garganjua
Through The Void
HOLY ROAR

Sorrowful UK doom heavyweights fall just short of the sublime

Upping the heavy since their debut, *A Voyage In Solitude*, Leicestershire doom quartet Garganjua return with their second full-length. *Crushed Beneath The Tide*, the first of four tracks totalling 45 minutes, envelops you in atmospheric solemnity before subjecting you to withering death bellows and bursts of all-out crush grooving. *Adrift* takes pining leads and runs with them, aching with funereal sadness as guitars slowly burn to ash beneath morose melodies. The title track marries a downbeat groove with a furious vocal, breaking at the midpoint into airless oceans of gothic melancholy. A cosmic aura descends for closer *A Distant Shore*, introducing fragile strings into a largely instrumental, existence-pondering procession. Much like their touring buddies Pallbearer, Garganjua's crushing sorrow seeks elevation on updrafts of baleful melody, but never quite hits the same heights. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Pallbearer, Yob, Conan

TOM O'BOYLE

Grave Lines want to show you how deep the rabbit hole goes

Grave Lines
Fed Into The Nihilist Engine
NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

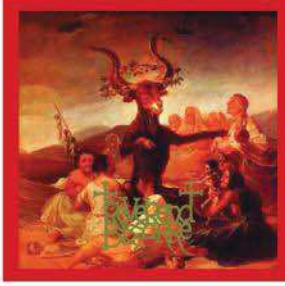
UK doom/sludge unit head down some picturesque dark alleys

DEFTLY SIDE-STEPPING that all-too-real 'difficult second album syndrome', London/Brighton's Grave Lines dive further down the rabbit hole to deliver their darkest, most dynamic effort to date. Featuring members of Throne, Sea Bastard, Dead Existence, Dysteria and The Death Letter in their ranks, the foursome have created an epic opus that's as strong as their pedigree suggests. Comprised of nine cuts, the band cram many moods and ideas into the music, often over the course of a single track, and there's a wealth of hooks on offer that regularly threaten to embed themselves in your cerebral cortex for an aeon (*Failed Skin*). While Grave Lines' second slab of wax is unquestionably an unashamed, unrelenting doom record, there are also flashes of dark folk (*Shame Retreat*) and 70s prog (*Loathe Displace* effectively uses synths to tell its ominous tale) to be found, too, as well as a few nods to goth (*Self Mutilation By Fire And Stone*). Frontman Jake Harding does a sterling job throughout, leading the band onward through the darkness, and his performances – which veer from a paint-stripping roar to a grim baritone and call to mind Dead Can Dance's Brendan Perry and Depeche Mode's Dave Gahan – are often utterly spellbinding. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Neurosis, Kylesa, Me And That Man

EDWIN McFEE

Original Sins *A CLASSIC ALBUM FROM THE DARKEST VAULT*



Reverend Bizarre In The Rectory Of The Bizarre Reverend
SINISTER FIGURE *2002*

It had to be perfect. It had to. It didn't matter the original label folded soon afterwards, nor that their frontman Sami 'Albert Witchfinder' Hynninen lost his sanity over it – or even that they were just an unknown band coming from Lohja, a small town 40km outside of Helsinki, made of one straight-edge drummer, one soon-to-be married guitar player and one maniac-depressive compulsive artist. From its roaring opener, *Burn In Hell*, down to the final cymbal sound of the massive, 21-minute-long *Cirith Ungol*, or even its band picture inside featuring a perfect replica of the *Paranoid* gatefold illustration, this mother of all debuts didn't just resurrect the whole classic doom movement, it sat on its throne, forever.

OLIVIER BADIN

Necros Christos: bowing out on their own terms

Necros Christos

Domedon Doxomedon

SEPULCHRAL VOICE

Germany's occult death precursors bow out at length

NECROS CHRISTOS have played the game their way, all the way until the end. Initially shrouded in mystery, they predated the whole 'occult death metal' wave, only to break with the pack as soon as it was starting to take off. And after scattered live appearances and a carefully crafted image had boosted their profile, they abruptly announced in 2014 that their forthcoming third album would be their last. One should approach *Domedon Doxomedon* with care, then, especially since it always takes some time to adjust yourself to their stripped-down and dry sound. It's the opposite of the expected bass-heavy cavernous beast, devoid of most of its human elements and as impenetrable as an old grimoire written in ancient tongue. But this near-two-hour-long epitaph would probably have been unbearable had it been a Portal-like maelstrom of dissonant outbursts. These Berliners never hide themselves behind tons of effects, nor do they do go for complicated structures, even if they sometimes pull out all the doom brakes and go in full-on epic mode with five tracks nearing or overstepping the 10-minute mark here.

Recorded with probably vintage gear, sonically *Domedon Doxomedon* never tries to outplay *Incantation*'s murkiest dirges and has more links with Candlemass, a slowed-down version of Acheron, early Asphyx and even classic 70s rock – check out *Seven Altars Burn In Sin*'s ballad-like part with its twin guitar harmonies battling à la Thin Lizzy for proof. Out of 27 tracks listed here, 15 are short instrumentals ranging from 'kosmische muzik'-inspired soundscapes to Eastern-tinged acoustics and piano-led sombre lullabies, suggesting the spiritual journey it longs to be. But such a massive undertaking requires ad hoc songwriting and their 'metal' material is too samey, failing to truly grab you by the throat when it needs to, making this an impressive but incomplete gravestone. At least Necros Christos die like they lived: in their own unique way.

7

FOR FANS OF: Asphyx, Acheron, early Vital Remains

OLIVIER BADIN

Grá

Väsen

CARNAL

Dark Funeral frontman revisits his Swedish BM roots

Founded in 2010 by Dark Funeral vocalist Heljarmadr, Stockholm outfit Grá return with their third album of classic 90s Swedish black metal. Closely resembling the aforementioned Dark Funeral, Grá's straightforward, no-frills assault treads no new ground but is satisfying in its nostalgic revelry, delivering a mixed bag of the some of the genre's finest with added pep. *Väsen*'s speedy tempos evoke the rattling bombast of *Legion*-era Marduk and its subtle keyboard textures and winding melodics accomplish the same classic Swedish strains of fellow countrymen Sacramentum, The Abyss and Setherial. While Grá don't reach to the majestic heights of Dissection or delve to the morbidly atmospheric underbelly of Craft, the band still carry a sentimental 90s charm that will appeal to those craving old Scandic black metal.

6

FOR FANS OF: Dark Funeral, Sacramentum, Marduk

LIAM YATES

Hundred Year Old Man

Breaching

GIZEH /WOLVES & VIBRANCY

North-England post-metallers mix atmosphere and aggression

Combining a high concept with a punishing low end makes for a stirring combination on this Leeds six-piece's debut album. Building upon last year's understatedly profound *Rei* EP, *Breaching*'s spoken-word passages and field recordings give calmer passages an elegant profundity offset by tumultuously heaving, sludge-weighted post-riffery. *Black Fire* throws punches like a prize fighter, snarling and swaggering into its final round, before the string augmented lamentations of *The Forest*. *Long Wall*'s urgent guitar stabs and glowering antipathy are followed by the tragic shimmer of *Disconnect*. *Ascension* ends the record on a mellifluous high, Hundred Year Old Man's rage eventually boiling over from beneath a multifarious uplift of empowering guitar. Existentially consternated and charismatically eruptive, despite the fact that there is little to distinguish the band apart from many of their ilk, *Breaching* makes for a vital, emotively tremulous debut.

7

FOR FANS OF: Cult Of Luna, Amenra, Conjurer

TOM O'BOYLE

Johansson & Speckmann

From The Mouth Of Madness

SOULSELLER

Ultra-prolific death metal guitarist puts in another day at the office

It's not even summer yet but Swedish machine Rogga Johansson has already taken part in half a dozen albums – with as many more to come – released in 2018, among them this, his fourth collaboration with 54-year-old death metal pioneer Paul Speckmann from Master, even if the two have yet to meet in person. With the Swede happy just to regurgitate an umpteenth variation on Grave's *Into The Grave* riff template without blinking alongside his esteemed yet clearly-not-very-concerned-about colleague, this feels like another mid-paced old-school death metal album until guest shredder Kjetil Lynghaug saves the day. No wonder Rogga has enrolled him for some of his most recent ventures (Paganizer, Echelon, Stass), his melodic and emphatic leads providing a more-than-welcome breath of fresh air in what remains an immediately edible yet easily forgettable album for Paganizer and Master maniacs only.

5

FOR FANS OF: Master, Grave, Massacre

OLIVIER BADIN

SMALL MERCIES

SHORT BLASTS

Carpathian Forest

Likeim

INDIE RECORDINGS

Twelve years after their last album, Norway's nastiest are back with two new tracks – including a furious dismantling of Turbonegro's *All My Friends Are Dead* – that confirm that absolutely nothing has changed in the slightest. Thank fuck for that. **[7]**

DOM LAWSON

Candlemass

House Of Doom

NAPALM

Set to promote their recent partnership with a gambling site (!), this second EP in a row for the apparently retired Swedish veterans plays it a tad too safe, although the ballad *Fortuneteller* is a fine breather. **[6]**

OLIVIER BADIN

Pulver

Pulver EP

GATES OF HELL

Germany's Pulver trade in high-energy, late 70s/early 80-style heavy metal, and this self-titled EP of three cheery anthems of stout-hearted rock'n'roll gallop is a promising teaser of their greasy Teutonic steel. **[7]**

LIAM YATES

Knelt Rote
Alterity
NUCLEAR WAR NOW!

Noise-grind powerhouse set up camp at the sonic precipice

Experiencing Knelt Rote's broiling black/death-grind is akin to sticking your ears to a red-hot iron. With a foundation in noise/power-electronics, this trio knows how to make it hurt. Their fourth album, *Alterity*, does just that, but it's also their most dynamic downpour of filth yet. The scalding riffs are more discernible, the structures sharpened for maximum impact, and tracks such as *Lineage And Dependence* and *Rumination* are posed in such a way that for the first time Knelt Rote sound memorable while still on the verge of chaos. Brevity is also the key to the success of this aural annihilation, with the band destroying everything in their path in a no-second-wasted, 21-minute sensory barrage. *Alterity* should summon the attention of fans of Full Of Hell or Revenge as much as those dedicated to Immolation or Anaal Nathrakh.

8

FOR FANS OF: Revenge, Full Of Hell, Portal

DEAN BROWN

Lik
Carnage
METAL BLADE

Scando-death's buzzsaw-wielding new breed hit the jackpot

As confirmed with considerable venom on their 2015 debut, *Mass Funeral Evocation*, Lik are zealous advocates of the legendary Swedish death metal sound, HM-2 pedals and all. What they've also mastered on their second album is the razor-sharp, ruthlessly direct songwriting that informed At The Gates' seminal *Slaughter Of The Soul*. Consequently, *Carnage* is more potent, memorable and revelatory than any number of worthy but unremarkable records made by the omnipresent legions of Nihilist clones. The perfect marriage of buzzsaw bluster and unstoppable hooks, everything from mad-eyed and stabby opener *To Kill* to dark, bilious denouement *Embrace The End* feels both meticulously crafted *and* driven by seldom-heard levels of intensity. At times, this is almost comically exciting: listen to *Only Death Is Left Alive* at maximum volume and you may shit yourself with pure death metal joy.

8

FOR FANS OF: At The Gates, Dismember, Black Breath

DOM LAWSON

Morag Tong
Last Knell Of Om
SELF-RELEASED

London's progressive doom-dealers start to tighten the screws

If you're a doom consumer then Morag Tong are your dealers. The London four-piece now offer different notes, variant hues within their funereal palette. Their preceding EP, *Through Clouded Time*, was a decent listen, but also a loosey-goosey tooth-rattler lacking variation, whereas *Last Knell Of Om* tightens the band up, with more riffs peeling out, more musical stones unturned, elongated clean sections earning their keep amid the fuzz. Adam Asquith's doom-by-numbers vocals are strong as always, but when he lets go, when he screams over *To Soil*'s sonic degradation – that's where Morag Tong could be taking things into an emotive territory that gives them a fully realised identity. As of now, they are a good doom outfit with progressive inclinations – 13-minute finale, *Ephemera / Stare Through The Deep*, proves they can do this without ballsing up – and basslines heavier than a yuletide divorce.

6

FOR FANS OF: Sleep, YOB, Electric Wizard

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

Ommadon
End Times
DRY COUGH

Glaswegian drone merchants herald a monotonous apocalypse

Recorded by the mercurial Billy Anderson, Ommadon's latest doom crawl, *End Times*, is comprised of one continuous piece split between two sides. Side A unfurls with the same sloth-like gait as Sunn O))), as a repetitious, lumbering riff cleaves a path, while Middle-Eastern-phrased leads encircle it early on. The drums then enter as the quaking riff takes on additional weight, hammering the same theme over and over to the point of hypnotism… or boredom, depending on your capacity for this kind of fundamentalist drone. Deep growls take a surprising lead as the first side closes out. Side B – the more interesting and tense half – includes some pained shrieks among Ommadon's attempts at summoning the apocalypse through one-dimensional amplifier abuse. Overall, it may not be as engrossing as 2014's sprawling double album *V*, but it's certainly a fitting addition to Ommadon's misanthropic discography.

6

FOR FANS OF: Khanate, Colstblood, Bismuth

DEAN BROWN

My Favourite Artwork

HJALTI SVEINSSON
Auðn
AGALLOCH
Marrow Of The Spirit

"The painting on *Marrow Of The Spirit* makes the whole album feel that much more like a piece to be cherished. It complements the bleak yet beautiful sound of the album and connects you visually with the nature you feel enveloped in while listening."

Witchsorrow celebrate another triumph

Witchsorrow
Hexenhammer
CANDLELIGHT/SPINEFARM

Doom metal traditionalists revel in the end of the world

UK DOOM TRIO

Witchsorrow have been steadily refining their sound with each successive album, culminating in 2015's towering, anthemic *No Light, Only Fire*. It was difficult to see how they were going to top that record, but new opus *Hexenhammer* chisels their lumbering morass into an even more efficient beast. The band's gruelling touring schedule over the last few years has evidently paid off, as they sound tighter and punchier than ever here, especially on more uptempo, unashamedly metallic bangers like *The Devil's Throne* and *Eternal* – a track that augments its molasses-thick grooves with bouncy, Judas Priest-esque verses. Witchsorrow have never been one of those bands to favour amp worship over good old-fashioned songwriting skills, and their compositional muscle just seems to get tauter every year; songs like *The Parish* might sound utterly suffocating when you're in the midst of them, but you'll still find yourself singing them in the shower afterwards.

Working once again with producer extraordinaire Chris Fielding, the album boasts a dense, booming production with some seriously satisfying low-end frequencies, and a crisp, thunderous drum sound that helps these song hit home even harder. Guitarist Necroskull turns in his most vitriolic, aggressive vocal performance yet, too, alternating between pained, hateful roars and soaring hooks on flattening centrepiece *Demons Of The Mind*, a song that has 'future live favourite' written all over it.

At a lean 43 minutes, *Hexenhammer* is the most potent distillation of the Witchsorrow sound to date, while hinting at exciting new territory for the three-piece; final track *Like Sisyphus* flirts with sinister, psychedelic guitar lines before erupting in a flurry of blastbeats and chilling tremolo riffs. With their dedication to vintage metal songcraft shining through each ominous note, this is yet another triumph for one of doom metal's most committed contemporary standard-bearers.

8

FOR FANS OF: Electric Wizard, Saint Vitus, Cathedral

KEZ WHELAN

Tsjuder aren't always on the same page

Resurrections

Unearthing the latest extreme metal reissues

A SWISS THRASH trio on Noise Records, **CORONER** were quick to outgrow the 'Celtic Frost Mini-Me' tag on a triptych of late-80s LPs exemplifying the concept of progress and refinement. 1987 debut *R.I.P.* **[7]** instantly pricked up ears with its blend of dark, twisting gung-ho thrash and sublimely technical, virtuosic musical ideas. 1988's *Punishment For Decadence* **[8]** crammed in even more of these, some accessibly smooth and melodic, others dizzyingly rough and frenzied. Mad guitar runs, hyperactive time-changes and an aura of cerebral mystery predominated, pointing the way for Coroner's masterpiece, 1989's *No More Color* **[10]**, a compulsive tech-thrash classic bursting with offbeat personality and prowess. Every metal home should have one.

French band **AGRESSOR** released their third album, *Symposium Of Rebirth*, in 1994, stretching the limits of their generic-but-spirited thrashing death-grind. The highlight was always their ambitious rendition of *Conan The Barbarian* soundtrack tunes; on *Rebirth* **[8]** (Season Of Mist), a reissue plus re-recording, that suite becomes track one, now opening a release that has, unusually, been vastly improved on the new version.

Another band rescuing old material with new recordings through Season Of Mist are Norwegian black metallers **TSJUDER**, whose 1997 debut EP sounds like drunk wasps in a tin can. They've revisited those two tracks (and two brief, inessential instrumentals) on *Throne Of The Goat 1997-2017* **[7]**, an incalculably tighter and more powerful rendering of some fun-but-generic juvenilia.

Swedish doom trio **COUNT RAVEN**'s first two albums, *Storm Warning* **[8]** and *Destruction Of The Void* **[8]** (Metal Blade) don't need re-recording. Their budget-Sabbath groove and grime remains a perfect fit for their creepy basement vibes, soporific quasi-Iommi riffs and Ozzy-on-Quaaludes vocals, taken up a gear by singer Dan Fondelius on *Destruction...*, which just has the edge.

CHRIS CHANTLER

Skeletal Remains

Devouring Mortality

CENTURY MEDIA

Death metal revivalists finally outgrow their influences

Before you accuse these Californians of jumping on the early-90s Floridian revival, back-pedal to 2009 when their guitarist and vocalist joined Fueled By Fire – the former old-school thrashers who gradually upgraded their brutality to deathier levels. In a way, Chris Monroy may be achieving here what he attempted with the two albums he recorded with FBF. After two youthful yet slightly unfocused platters in 2012 and 2015, Skeletal Remains' third full-length raises the bar, production and performance-wise. Chris could still be mistaken for *Pestilence*-era Martin van Drunen and the Dan Seagrave artwork only emphasises their debt to death metal's early days. But boosted by Dan Swanö's bombastic mix and a more technical yet also more personal sound, the result exceeds the expected classic-Florida-via-California-brutality, still rooted in the past but with a bright future ahead.

7

FOR FANS OF: Pestilence, Death, early Gorguts

OLIVIER BADIN

Skinless

Savagery

RELAPSE

US death metal veterans return with a newfound scope

There are three distinct chapters in Skinless's 25-year history: the 1992-2003 period when they were a technically efficient yet undistinguished outfit; the *Trample The Weak, Hurdle The Dead* period when they found a deadlier and catchier groove having switched singers, only to split three years later; and their 2015 reunion with their original growler, when they returned to a simpler, in-your-face approach. This successor to 2015's *Only The Ruthless Remain* is a good balance of old and new, proving that next to Cannibal Corpse and Jungle Rot, Skinless are a rare case of a band still rooted in the classic US death metal sound yet capable of a broader audience. The few subtle touches – the morbid, Slayerish harmonies of *Reversal Of Fortune* and *Medieval*, the slam beatdowns of *Skull Session* – never get in the way of their gory sensibilities.

7

FOR FANS OF: Cannibal Corpse, Slayer, Dying Fetus

OLIVIER BADIN

Trautonist

Ember

WOLVES AND VIBRANCY

Post-black metallers reach a range of new sonic textures

Hellbent on pushing the parameters of post and black metal as far as possible, and driven by an insatiable appetite for destruction – as far as pigeonholing is concerned, anyway – genre-bucking German duo Trautonist earned plenty of acclaim for their eponymous 2016 debut. Its sequel, *Ember*, will only increase their stock as it's an incendiary opus, crammed with magnetic efforts that redefine what it means to be 'metal'. Comprised of seven tracks, the pair let their imaginations run rampant throughout and draw on disparate influences ranging from Alcest to Cocteau Twins. Opener *Fire And Ember* sets out their stall strongly and manages to sound both sweet and scathing, while goth and alt-pop-peppered *The Garden* is gloriously gloomy thanks to some haunting vocals from Katharina, and *Woody Allen* throws some trip hop into their already-bulging melting pot.

8

FOR FANS OF: Russian Circles, Chelsea Wolfe, Alcest

EDWIN McFEE

Wayfarer

World's Blood

PROFOUND LORE

Denver's atmospheric black metallers take aim at the pioneers

Denizens of icy wastes thousands of miles from black metal's traditional heartlands, Colorado's Wayfarer are attempting a similar connection to their native lands. The pastoral black metal of their third album is steeped in American colonial history, with tales of Western lands wrought in conquest. Flitting between ravaging black metal and folk-infused, wide-open spaces, *Animal Crown* is driven in its rage, by turns rapacious and smouldering. *The Crows Ahead Cry War* is cinematic, a folky canter slowly building tension into the outbreak of war. *A Nation Of Immigrants* is as pointed as its title, a collective lament creating a poignant close. America has long yearned for the deep connection to a storied historical past that Europeans take for granted. Wayfarer take them a step closer, capable of rendering their embryonic years with fittingly brutal blood-spattered and desolate recrimination.

8

FOR FANS OF: Panopticon, Wolves In The Throne Room, Pillorian

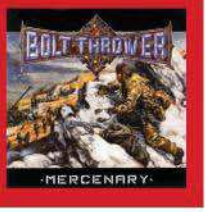
TOM O'BOYLE

Inspirations From Beyond

KEIJO NIINIMAA
Rotten Sound

BOLT THROWER
Mercenary

"This album has been on rotation since it came out. Every riff and arrangement feels just perfect and the production works seamlessly with the material. I love the way they decided to play some parts quite a bit longer than expected, which suits me fine because these riffs are never getting old."



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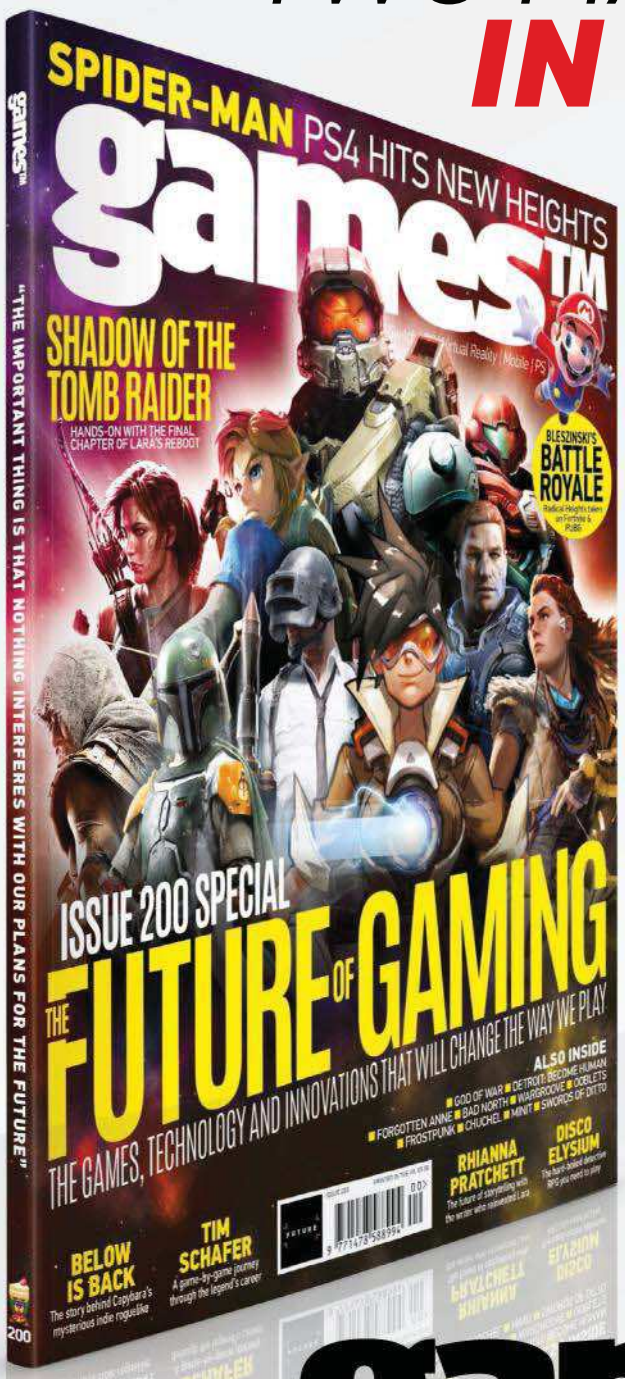

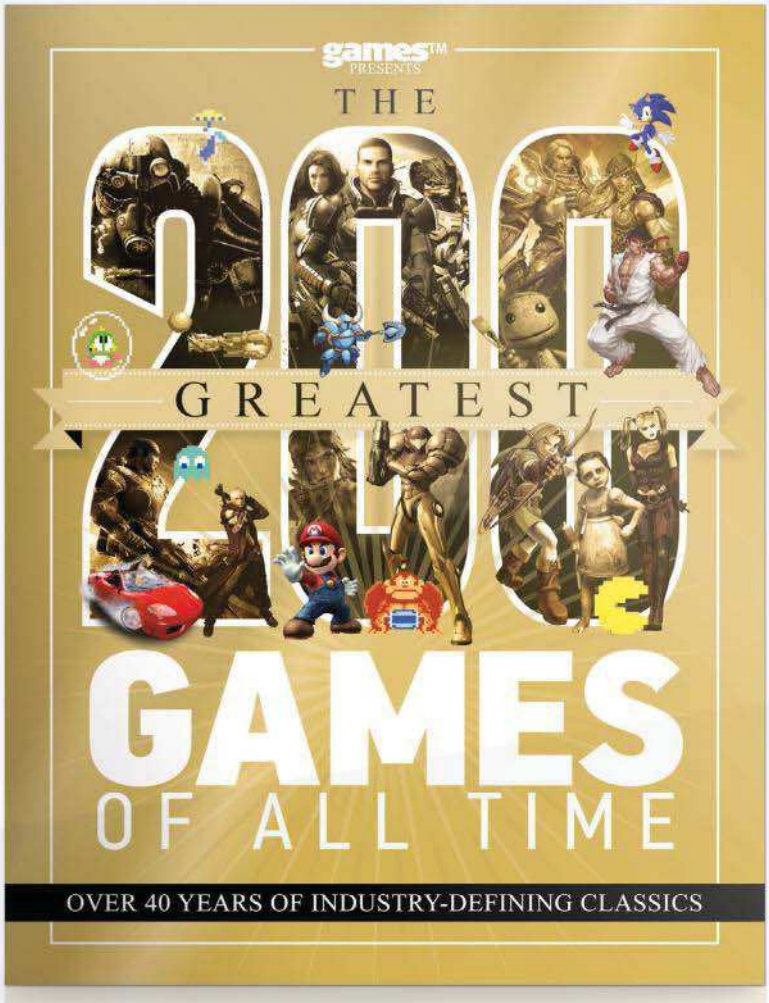

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Cave In's Stephen Brodsky gives a heartfelt tribute to Caleb Scofield

Julie Christmas reaches for the stars with Cult Of Luna

Converge: Jacob Bannon curates... and berates

Roadburn 2018

VARIOUS VENUES, TILBURG

Converge frontman curates a weekend of far-flung wonders

THURSDAY

And so the pilgrimage is made, once again, by 3,000 metalheads, crusties and hippies to sunny Tilburg for the mind-altering experience that is Roadburn. Less a festival, more "a happening", as this year's curator Jacob Bannon calls it. Opening proceedings on the vast 013 stage is a specially commissioned piece of music, dubbed **THE WASTE OF SPACE ORCHESTRA [8]**. Beneath 70s sci-fi imagery, members of Oranssi Pazuzu and Dark Buddha Rising create one of the most sinister visions ever witnessed. Across the street at Het Patronaat, **ÅRABROT**'s **[7]** journey from mystic noise scavengers to avant, blues-baked pilgrims continues through a disappointingly thin PA.

The first of two **CONVERGE [8]** sets is a performance of new album *The Dusk In Us*. One of 2017's greatest albums is destroyed onstage by four of Boston's finest, delivering a devastating *I Can Tell You About Pain* that ratchets up the volume. Next, **CULT OF LUNA & JULIE CHRISTMAS [10]** perform *Mariner* in its entirety for the final time. A breathtaking display of artistry amidst shadows, smoke and strobes, it's as much a spiritual experience as it is a musical one. Masters of horrified death metal delivered at a snail's pace, **HOODED MENACE [8]** perform their *Fulfil The Curse* debut in full and receive a well-earned heroes' reception. Initially getting in on the classic-album-in-full act, only to flip the script, **WEEDEATER [7]** abandon their run-through of *God Luck And God Speed*, freewheeling instead through a blizzard of randomly selected red-eyed ragers instead. The riffs win, either way.

FRIDAY

If you think Roadburn is po-faced, try watching **MUTOID MAN [8]**. Stephen Brodsky's onstage patter is the perfect antidote to the hellacious music elsewhere, and their psych-metal-prog-pop-riff hybrid provides a joyous early bounce. Dazzling and dynamic, **MOTORPSYCHO [10]** prove why they are so highly regarded in prog and psychedelic circles. From blissful fragility to fuzz-metal fury, they nail it all with bright-eyed but insouciant mastery. Meanwhile at Patronaat, Tribulation's mystic androgyne, **JONATHAN HULTÉN [7]**, makes up for a lost voice by singing to harmonised backing tracks: still entrancing but lacking the direct power his acoustic set could have summoned otherwise. And then there's **IGORRR [5]**. WTF?

Everyone knows that **CROWBAR [9]** are fucking heavy. Today they're just *heavier*. Bulldozing through *Odd Fellows Rest*, they confirm that the album remains their masterpiece and that Kirk Windstein's riffs are still unbeatable. **CONVERGE**'s **[9]** *You Fail Me* played in full was always going to be a highlight, but this is something else. There is an energy in the air, and despite the volume being too quiet, it's an emotional ordeal. A cover of *Wolverine Blues* with Tomas Lindberg and Kevin Baker sends Tilburg into a spasm. **GODFLESH [8]** are a vertebrae in Roadburn's spiritual spine. It's impossible not to gaze in awe as Broadrick and Green recreate their classic *Selfless* album. Majestic but beautifully bleak, *Black Boned Angel* is a major highlight. Iceland's blackened hardcore mob **UNE MISÈRE [8]** lay waste to the tiny Green Room, whipping up a mass of sweaty bodies. It's no wonder they end up playing twice more and selling out of merch. **GRAVE PLEASURES [7]** initially fail to live up to the anticipation – the sound isn't great and the first few songs struggle to connect with those here to dance – until the likes of *Infatuation Overkill* finally get the apocalyptic party started.

SATURDAY

"This is the hardest thing I've ever done," says Stephen Brodsky as he and fellow **CAVE IN**

Maggot Heart: Linnéa Olsson unleashes her inner punk

Árabrot reach a new sonic frontier

Jonathan Hultén casts a spell over Het Patronaat

Grave Pleasures get the apocalyptic party started

Igorrr have the gaul to bring breakcore to Roadburn

member Adam Mcgrath pay acoustic tribute to their late bandmate and friend, Caleb Scofield. It's a heart-rending testimony, covers of Caleb's favourite songs – Townes Van Zandt's *Nothing*, Neil Young's *Harvest Moon* – aching with resilient humanity, and Cave In tracks such as *Big Riff* both exposing the emotional core beneath the original progressive stylings and revealing Brodsky as one of the great American vocalists, carrying his burden with transformative grace. **BELL WITCH [8]** are also working through a bereavement, and they bring a doomy, hypnotic start to the Koepelhal venue, performing the boundary-breaking *Mirror Reaper* album in its entirety to a room lost in hushed wonder. **IVAR BJØRNSON & EINAR SELVIK**'s **[9]** *Hugsjá* project proves a perfect fit for Roadburn and it's no surprise the 013 is rammed. Their open-ended Norwegian odyssey has thousands transfixed, the rapt response at the end feeling like the breaking of an emotional dam.

Curator Jacob Bannon's **WEAR YOUR WOUNDS [8]** project takes the second stage into the depressive recesses of his mind through a prism of psychedelia and doom. Recreating legendary drone epic *Absolutego* and sending a packed house into a bruised, electrified trance, **BORIS & STEPHEN O'MALLEY [8]** are having an insane amount of fun on the main stage. And by Satan, it's fucking loud. Low-key gods of the post-everything era, **GODSPEED YOU! BLACK EMPEROR [10]** are so unerringly extraordinary that there are few dry eyes when they conclude the first of two epic sets with revered curio *BBF3*. Music seldom wields such mind-blowing, soul-enriching power.

Possibly the loudest band of the weekend, **ALL PIGS MUST DIE [9]** are a masterclass in powerviolence and brutality, and the fourth performance of Roadburn MVP Ben Koller. As nasty as they come and heavier than Mjolnir. **THOU X THE BODY [9]** take the award for the nastiest performance of the weekend, however. A brutal meld of white noise, piercing screams and punishing riffs, this is what gives you tinnitus. Covers of NIN and Shellac bolster an already powerful performance, and the encore is more than earned.

SETLIST

CONVERGE

First Light
Last Light
Black Cloud
Drop Out
Hope Street
Heartless
You Fail Me
In Her Shadow
Eagles Become Vultures
Death King
In Her Blood
Hanging Moon

ENCORE

Wolverine Blues

SUNDAY

Specially commissioned Icelandic Grand Guignol, **VÁNAGANDR: SÓL ÁN VARMA [8]** amounts to an exhilarating, wildly physical monument to windswept chaos beneath spectacular imagery of convulsing suns. Gripping from first to last, it's a quintessential Roadburn moment. **WIEGEDOOD**'s **[8]** bass-less, blackened blizzard continues to defy logic by being endlessly mesmerising. A seething, dominant *Parool* seals this iciest of deals. Never mind doom metal, the heaviest thing happening at Roadburn are the absurdly distorted beats that a reunited Justin Broadrick and Kevin Martin are pumping out as **ZONAL [9].** Augmented by hip hop poet Moor Mother's fiery invective, the duo's unfathomable subsonic girth stops time and eviscerates bowels. Equally devastating is **BIG BRAVE**'s **[9]** elliptical, emotional pilgrimage as Robin Wattie's stricken vocals rise up from tectonically heaving grooves in transcendent fashion. Fronted by ex-The Oath/Grave Pleasures guitarist Linnéa Olsson, **MAGGOT HEART [7]** mine a potent seam between punk fury and taut, skeletal groove. Closing the main stage, resplendently adorned Chinese black metallers **ZURIAAKE [7]** offer a captivatingly bleak experience on the main stage, their bleak odes to nature offering a final act of transportation that marries the exotic and adventurous in true Roadburn style.

DOM LAWSON/LUKE MORTON/JONATHAN SELZER

ESTER SEGARRA

Primordial: Alan Averill doesn't get mad, he gets heathen

Primordial

MOONSORROW/DER WEG EINER FREIHEIT

ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON

Moonsorrow wax lyrical about pagan folklore

Ireland's vagabond heroes unite the heathen hordes

THE OPULENT SURROUNDINGS of the Islington Assembly Hall seem an odd choice to host a tour dubbed the 'Heathen Crusade', but the BM renegades storming into the UK under that banner are more determined to raise your consciousness than lay waste to all around them. That's not to say that **DER WEG EINER FREIHEIT [7]** are anything but a sense-obliterating experience. Unspectacularly attired, the German four-piece mine a propulsive seam that teeters on post-BM territories without losing their primal essence. Wide in scope, tracks like *Requiem* ride tides of blastbeats as charged and churned riffs engulf you as if you're staring at the sun, but they feel like undergoing a rite of purification, both a solemn requiem and the beginning of a transformation into something spectacularly new. If there's any fault, it's that they rely on a similar set of dynamics throughout their set, but a closing *Aufbruch* becomes an incendiary, Icarus-flight storming of the heavens, riffs daring themselves to overload as they reach a state of ravaged glory.

Helsinki's tribal-striped, keyboard-bourne **MOONSORROW [8]** tread their own fine line these days, their sense of the epic now straddling the fevered pagan black metal of yore and a more showy sensibility whose ambition is split equally between greater accessibility and an expansiveness that shares a few trade routes with Enslaved. Even if their stage presence can border on the cheesy, at their root these songs are still infused with a heartfelt and potent resonance, balancing the sweeping folk pomp of *Kivenkantaja* with windblown odysseys such as *Kuolleiden Maa*, elevated into heroic realms.

Both the most serious of endeavours and anthem-hurling festival rabble-rousers, **PRIMORDIAL**'s **[9]** muse remains beholden to no one, their latest album, *Exile Amongst The Ruins* a weatherbeaten treatise on the state of the world, and all its historical echoes, that takes time to bed in. If there was any doubt about how it will translate live, it's immediately beaten back with the opening *Nail Their Tongues*, its grimly insistent groove urged onwards with all their typical, earthy heft as it ultimately becomes another rousing addition to their arsenal. Alan Averill, a rag-draped peasant prophet, is a fearsomely charismatic focal point, his voice a stormfront of grief and resilience, embodied with dramatic abandon. *To Hell Or The Hangman*'s riffs churn and boil over into a sublime, post-punk-infused charge, while the rolling surge of *As Rome Burns* and a closing *Empire Falls* summon up a cathartic whorl of sound that binds a rapt crowd into a fever pitch of elation.

JONATHAN SELZER

SETLIST

Nail Their Tongues
Gods To The Godless
Exile Amongst The Ruins
No Grave Deep Enough
To Hell Or The Hangman
As Rome Burns
Stolen Years
Traitors Gate
Where Lie The Gods
Upon Our Spiritual Deathbed
The Coffin Ships
Empire Falls

Uada
ALDA/AURI
NAMBUCCA, LONDON

Amidst suitably grim weather, tonight's invasion of four-letter bands is a powerful draw. The venue is already packed when **AURI [6]**, the only British band, open with their atmospheric take on black metal. Their four lengthy songs offer a good balance of fast riffs and melody, and if vocalist Thirteen seems to struggle combining guitar playing and singing, the instrumental parts surge with thrilling energy. Washington state's **ALDA [8]** mesmerise the crowd with a tight and flowing set. Combining BM and folk with doomy overtones, their haunting set flows like one complex yet perfectly executed song. Oregon's **UADA [8]** are atypical of the current USBM scene, dressed ceremoniously in cowls, and referencing the more melodic yet still cult-infused likes of Dissection and Mgła. Sonically assaulting the audience with groovy black metal riffs, their performance is a welcome change of pace that starts the night's first pit and even some dancing, too. A night of new interpretations of black metal, expertly executed.

MAGDALENA MEDVED

Winterfylleth
ST PANCRAS OLD CHURCH, LONDON

It's quite the sight: a hundred or so metalheads (some in *seriously* necro shirts) attending church on a Friday night. And while it can be assumed that most aren't believers, they're here to worship at the altar of Winterfylleth. But these centuries-old walls aren't shaking with savage black metal; we're witnessing a unique acoustic performance, leaning on new album *The Hallowing Of Heirdom*. The core band has expanded to nine members tonight, including cellist Jo Quail who performed earlier, and it sounds stunning. The building's acoustics carry the music to new heights and lend Chris Naughton's voice an earthy quality, complementing his tales of ye olde English folklore. Tossing in oldies like *When The Woods Were Young*, this is still a celebration of a new season dawning on the rich countryside of Winterfylleth. The standing ovation is well-deserved, although it's hard to see where the new sound will fit into the band's usual live fare, as it's a completely different beast. Let's hope we can travel back to the land of witches and stone circles soon.

8

LUKE MORTON

Sigiriya: Stu O'Hara hits the fuzz pedal

Bloody Kev conjures up some Monkey magic

Iron Monkey
SIGIRIYA
UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Seminal sludge crew make a filth-fuelled return

LOST IN THE mists of time, Welsh ruffians Acrimony were the finest stoner band ever to emerge from Europe. **SIGIRIYA [8]** started as four-fifths of them, before two had to go for a lie down. They have, however, kept the same darkly hypnotic grooves, steeped in Sabbath and Hawkwind, and former Acrimony and Iron Monkey guitarist Stu O'Hara has a knack for catchy and warmly enveloping riffs.

When Nottingham's loudest disintegrated in 1999 it seemed that the world would never again know the joy of the fist-in-the-face aggro of an **IRON MONKEY [9]** gig. When original core member Jim Rushby and Steve Watson announced a rebooted line-up many rejoiced, and some moaned. Monkey were very much a product of the Notts hardcore scene and so, with Jim sidelined by health issues it makes perfect sense to see Bloody Kev from the closely linked Hard To Swallow (amongst many) take the stage. Kev's equally savage broken glass-gargling screams are the perfect stand-in for the late and much-missed Johnny Morrow, and he shares a suitably wild-eyed, mouth-foaming sense of cathartic release. Andrew Morgan from Army Of Flying Robots does a killer job laying down those thick slabs of noise and filth. Queen and Black Sabbath riffs meet Burzum and classics like *Web Of Piss* and *Black Aspirin* still sound as vital as ever while new songs like *OmegaMangler* feel just like the band have never been away. Welcome back to Britain's nastiest.

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

Origin enter a state of technical ecstasy

Rings Of Saturn have cause to fret

Origin
RINGS OF SATURN
UNDERWORLD, LONDON

US tech-death supremos assault the senses

IF YOU'RE IMPRESSED by sheer technicality, then you might get a kick out of **RINGS OF SATURN [4]** and their self-proclaimed aliencore, but it's hard to see much more appeal than that. The trio are a man down, making them visually lopsided and lacking any kind of personality onstage, which is especially weird when you consider how eccentric their music is. When vocalist Ian Bearer leaves the stage to let his bandmates endlessly noodle, Rings Of Saturn's set goes from uneventful to tediously patience testing.

And, frankly, if you are going to base your appeal entirely on your technical chops, it's best not to try to compete with **ORIGIN [7]** as you do so. The New Yorkers have spent the last 15 years making some of the most dizzying tech-death imaginable, and tonight they blast through as much of their back catalogue as their blurring limbs can manage, concentrating particularly on the 10th anniversary of the *Antithesis* album. It's testament to the quality of their material that you often find yourself banging your head along with them, as much as purely just marvelling at the quality of the musicians up there. And as much as we're keen to state the how big a part each bandmember plays, with vocalist Jason Keyser's manic bug-eyed stare complementing his high-end screeching brilliantly, it's nigh-on impossible to take your eyes off of bassist Mike Flores, a man who has one of the most unique styles in music. Enjoyable? Quite. Impressive? Massively.

STEPHEN HILL

PRIMORDIAL: TINA KORHONEN/IRON MONKEY & ORIGIN: JAKE OWENS

THE METAL TEST

Pitting your heroes against the test that really matters

WORDS: MATT MILLS

BRENT SMITH

WHAT'S THE MOST ILLEGAL THING YOU'VE EVER DONE?
"When I was 16 I stole a pack of cigarettes. I got busted and had to spend a night in juvenile [detention center]." ✓

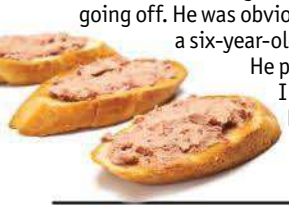
WHAT'S THE MOST METAL ALBUM YOU OWN?
"Probably…*And Justice For All*. There's no bass and that's lame, but, as far as quintessential, defining metal in my catalogue, that's it." ✓

WHAT'S THE WORST INJURY YOU'VE EVER HAD?
"I broke my right pinkie. I was wasted on Jack Daniel's, there were these fold-up wooden chairs, and I was messing with the tour manager for one of the other bands, like, 'Let's smash these chairs together!' We smashed them and, because they were folding chairs, my pinkie slid between the legs and basically snapped in half." ✓

WHAT'S THE GROSSEST THING YOU'VE EVER HAD IN YOUR MOUTH?
"I was in an elevator going to the office of my publisher. I had the flu and I coughed up this oyster-sized loogie just as the door opens. My publisher's in front of me, so I had to swallow it. I think I probably turned a couple shades of white." ✗

WHAT'S THE MOST YOU'VE EVER BEEN SICK?
"We were on tour and had a night off, and they had a famous chef staying at the hotel. I ordered pâté on toast for dinner that night in my room. At about 2:30am I went into the most violent vomiting and diarrhoea of my life! I defecated and threw up at the same time for about eight hours." ✓

WHAT'S THE WORST FIGHT YOU'VE EVER BEEN IN?
"We were at a charity event for cancer. This event took place in a tent between two bars, so it was just people getting shithoused. As we were walking out, this guy just starts going off. He was obviously drunk and he had a six-year-old kid on his shoulders! He puts his kid down and I see him charging for Barry [Kersch, drums]. I turn and sweep him, but as he falls he punches Eric [Bass, bass]!" ✓



WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME THAT YOU BLED?
"A week ago. I hadn't brushed my teeth all day and when I brushed them that night some blood came from my gums." ✗

WHAT'S THE RAREST PIECE OF MERCHANDISE THAT YOU OWN?
"When I was 14, my dad introduced me to Otis Redding. Years later, when I was on tour, a friend brought me a contract signed by Otis and his manager. There aren't many Otis signatures out there because he passed so early. I did own it, but I gave it to my dad." ✓

WHAT'S YOUR MOST PAINFUL TATTOO OR PIERCING?
"My stomach tattoo. It took two pints of vodka to get me through it." ✓

WHAT'S THE MOST METAL PICTURE ON YOUR PHONE?
"In 2006 we played 11 festival shows with Velvet Revolver. I have a picture of me and Slash. I'm flipping the bird and Slash is drinking out of a Crown Royal bottle." ✓

FINAL SCORE: 8/10 After hanging with Slash, throwing up all night and having a ridiculous fight, Brent nails a fine score. If only he bled a little more…

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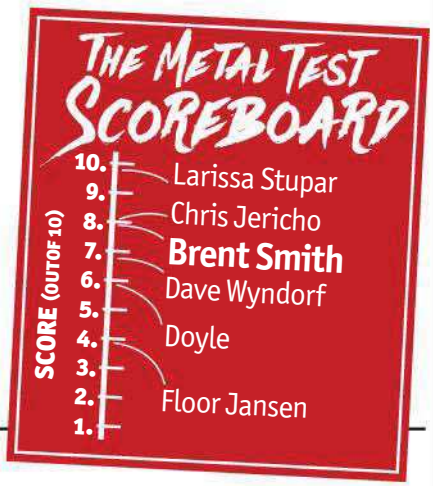

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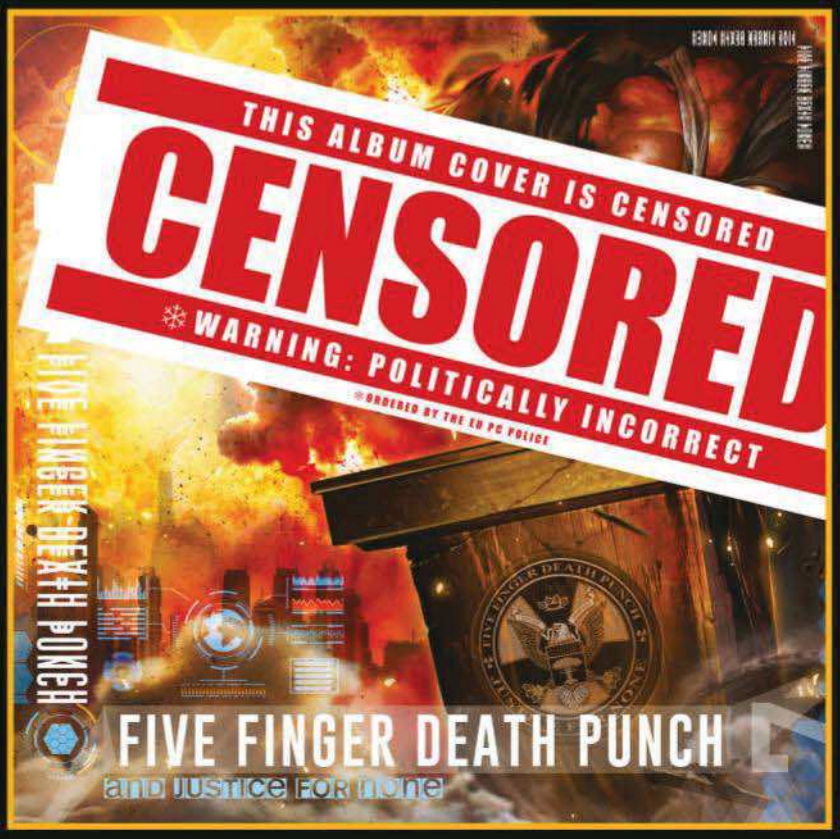

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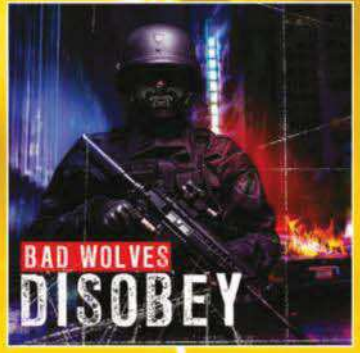

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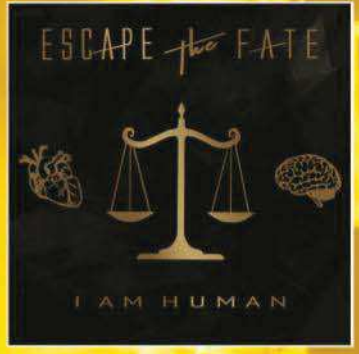

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